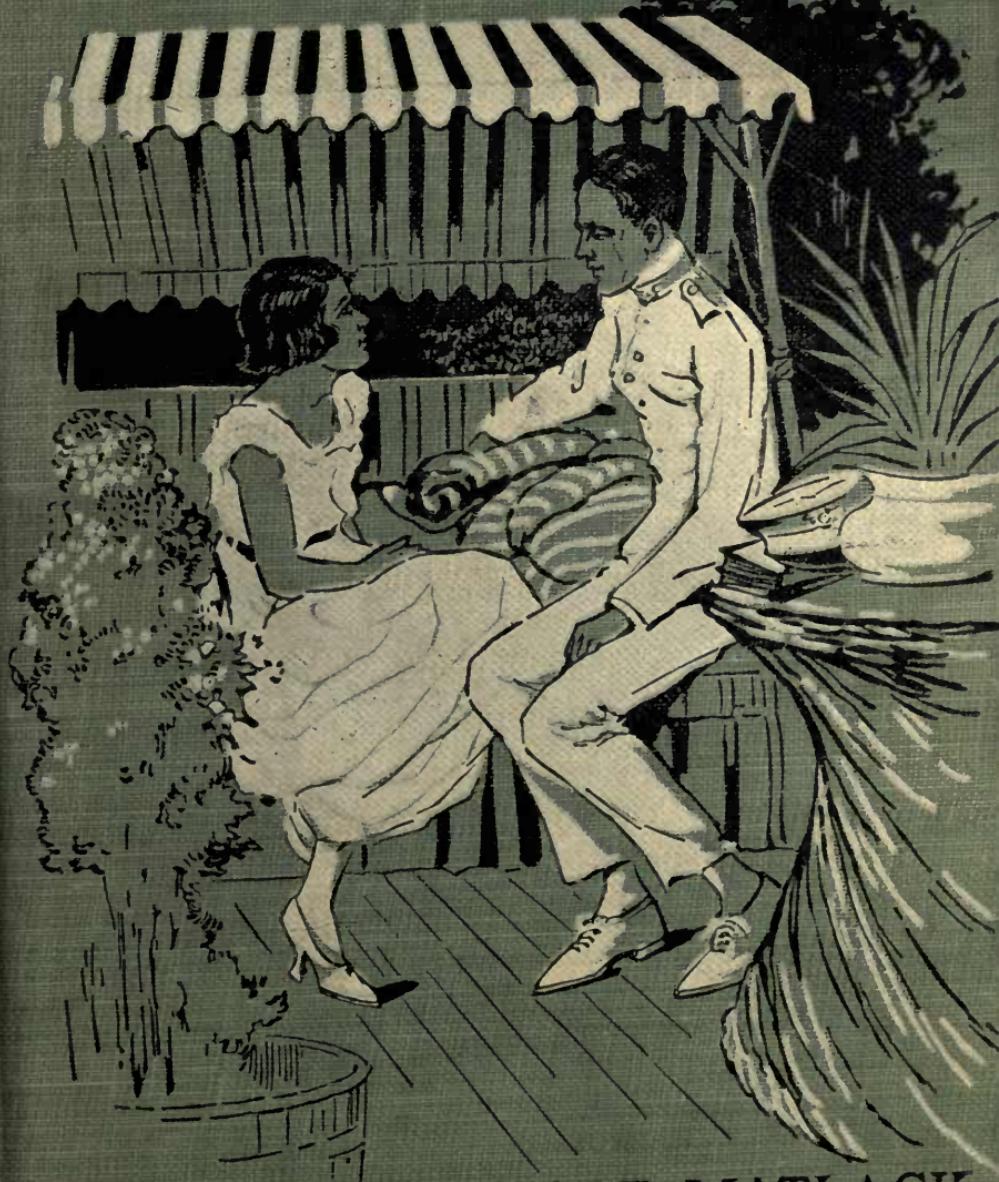


SERGEANT JANE



MARGARET MOORE MATLACK

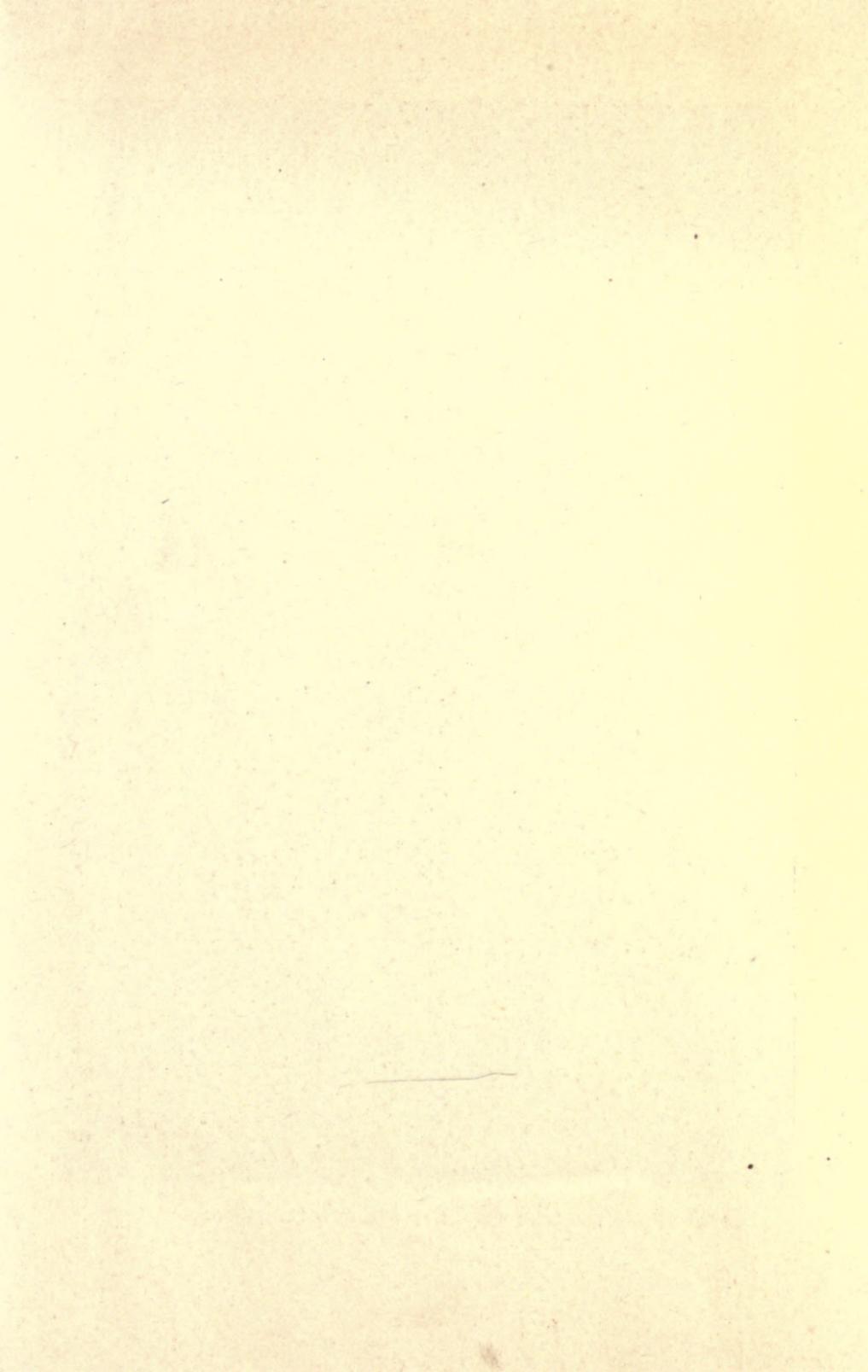


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SERGEANT JANE

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“Is n’t the house adorable?” — FRONTISPICE. See page 65.

SERGEANT JANE

BY

MARGARET MOORE MATLACK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
NANA FRENCH BICKFORD



BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1920

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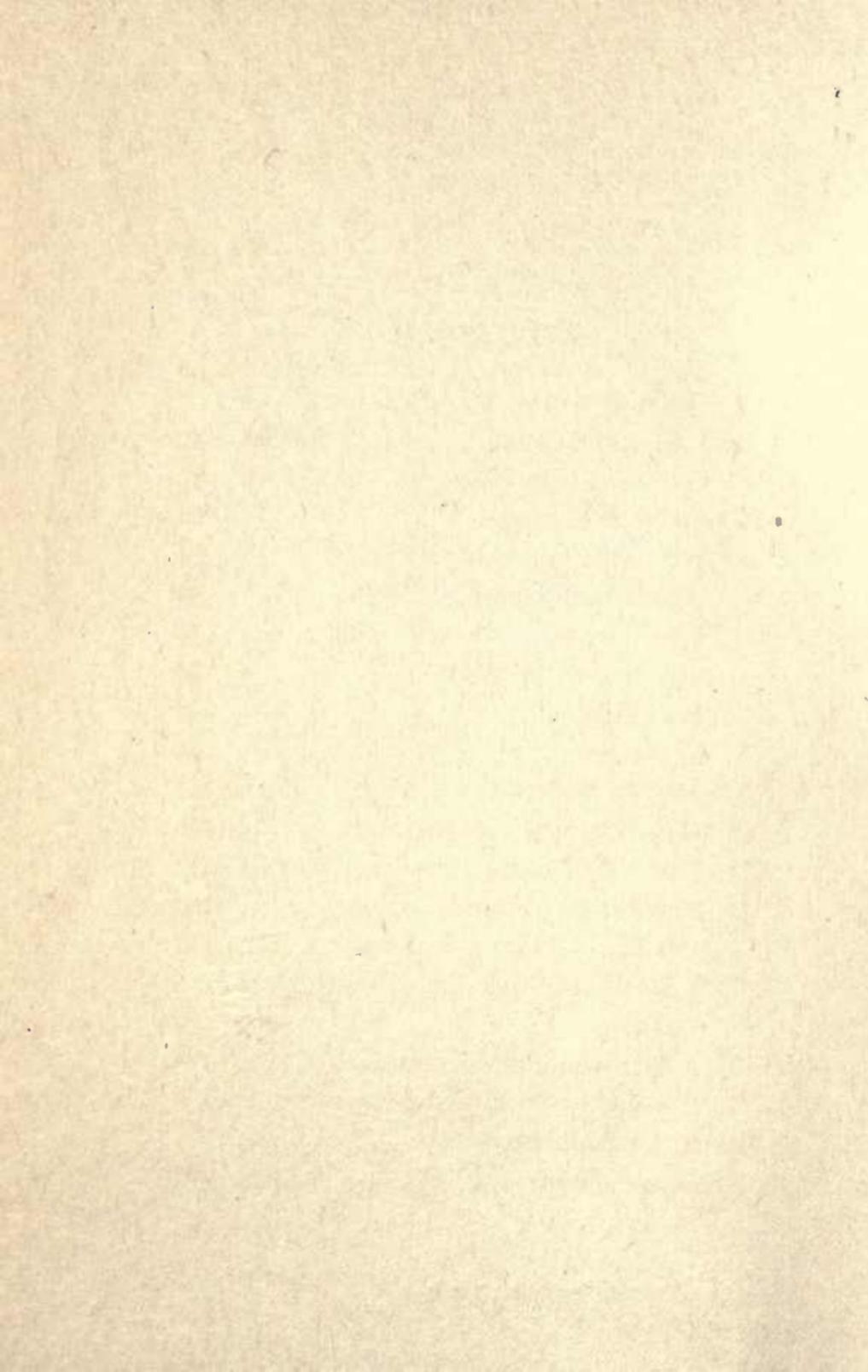
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To

MY YOUNG SISTERS

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SERGEANT JANE

CHAPTER I

ORDERED SOUTH

“ **J**ANE, have you done your algebra ?” It was Martha asking it, of course. She knew perfectly well that I had n’t done my algebra, or my English, or anything else, for I had just come over from the barracks and plunked down on the davenport in front of the open fire to dry off. Martha is only three years older than I am, but she often tries to act as though she were my mother.

“ I have not; and I ’m not going to,” I told her quite frankly, and quickly took the offensive. “ If you want to know what I think, Martha Graves, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself even to

mention such — such trivial things as lessons, when Father is coming home from Washington to-night and will probably have his orders with him!"

Martha tried to look scornful and pretended to be very busy with her Caesar, but pretty soon she came over and sat on the davenport beside me.

"Where do you suppose we 'll be sent?" she demanded, as eagerly as though that same question had n't been asked at least fifty times a day since Daddy came back from France the month before with three service stripes and a commission as a lieutenant-colonel.

"I told you I was betting on the Philippines," I answered carelessly. Martha hated uncivilized places, so I always guessed them.

"But, Jane, we 've been there," she argued, as usual, "and we 've never been to New York or to San Francisco. Oh! I do hope and pray it 's a big city!"

“Wherever it is, we won’t have as much fun as we’ve had here at Norfolk,” I prophesied gloomily, kicking the andirons crossly at the thought of leaving.

Just then the gong rang for dinner, and before we had reached our favorite “floating-island-with-jelly” dessert, which Jimmy reported having seen in the kitchen, in walked Father.

We all jumped up from the table and rushed at him shrieking: “Did you get ‘em?” “Did you find out?” “Where are we going?”

But he just smiled and went over to kiss Mother, who was sitting there as calmly as though it made no difference to her whether we were sent to Timbuctoo or the Desert of Sahara. Then he kissed each of us, very deliberately — which seemed rather superfluous under the circumstances, especially as he had only been gone a day. We thought he never would speak, and when he finally did, it was only to ask:

“Well, Redhead (my hair is really light brown and not much of it at that, being bobbed, but Dad likes to tease) — Well, Redhead, what was your bet?”

“Philippines,” I replied promptly.

“Mine was New York,” Martha shouted, forgetting for once to be dignified.

“And mine wath Alathka, to thee the Ethkimoeth,” Jimmy added gravely.

“Then I’m afraid you all lose,” said Father, his eyes twinkling. “I’m ordered to take charge of the Marine Base at St. Thomas, one of the Virgin Islands.”

For at least a minute we were too dumfounded to say a word. Then we all began asking questions at once, until Dad put his fingers in his ears and shook his head at us frantically.

“One at a time, one at a time!” he begged. “No, Mother, I didn’t know myself that there was a Marine station there. It has only recently been established.

“Why, Marty, I’m surprised at you. Don’t they teach geography and history at the estimable Miss Mooney’s? The Virgin Islands, formerly the Danish West Indies, were bought by this country in March, 1917. St. Thomas is the next to largest of the three islands in the group, and as it’s said to be ‘on the way to every other place in the world’, it is a mighty good spot for a naval base.

“Where is it? In the Atlantic Ocean, about forty miles south of Porto Rico. It is approximately thirteen miles long by two miles wide; the population is ninety per cent. black; the climate —”

“All right, Stan,” Mother interrupted, laughing. “You’re getting mighty statistical all of a sudden. What’s that in your overcoat pocket?”

Dad admitted, with a chuckle, that he had been “studying up the situation” a little coming down on the train and meekly handed over a small red book, with a

gold-lettered title "Our Newest Possessions."

Jimmy and I were standing with our mouths open, not sure what we thought about it all, but Martha had evidently decided, for she turned to Father, looking as though she were going to cry any minute, and raised her voice in protest.

"Oh, Father, I don't want to go to a horrid old wild island with nothing but black people on it," she wailed. "Why did they have to choose you for that? It's not fair; not one bit."

Dad stared at her for a minute and then at us, and I guess we were n't looking especially happy either, for all the laughter died out of his face, and he said almost sternly:

"Those were my orders, Martha, and I did not care to dispute them. I am sorry that it means taking you away from the good friends you have made and the school you like so much. But if you youngsters want to keep on being the children of a

Marine officer (and we hope you are n't going to disown us just yet, don't we, Mother?) you still have a lot of moving around before you. Some places are bound to be more attractive than others, but I thought you would probably like the idea of going to any place as new and interesting as St. Thomas."

"They will like it, once they get used to the thought of leaving," Mother put in quietly. "It 's still hard for me to pull up stakes and move on every few years, and this is the first time Martha and Jane have been old enough to fully realize what it means. It 's especially hard this time, because Norfolk has been so lovely, and being here over three years has made it seem like a real home."

When Mother had finished her little speech, Martha shamefacedly murmured something about not meaning what she had said, and I tried to look as though St. Thomas were the one place in the world I

would have chosen to go to. But it took Jimmy to say the truly diplomatic thing.

“I don’t care where we go,” he assured Father, with as much dignity as though he were eighty instead of eight and had never heard of such a thing as losing two front teeth and acquiring in their place a most astonishing lisp. “It doeth n’t make any differenth where we are, tho long ath we are with the Marinth !”

That made us laugh, though Jimmy was quite hurt that it should, and we sat down at the table again and did full justice to the floating island, while Daddy read to us from “Our Newest Possessions.”

Afterwards they all went into the living room to talk it over around the fire. But I begged Father to take me over to the company canteen to tell the men the news, and Mother finally said that I might go if I put on my raincoat and overshoes, and took an umbrella, and did n’t stay more than an hour.

While I was in the hall closet hunting for my rubbers, I heard Martha say: "I don't see why you let her hang around the barracks all the time, Mother. Why does she want to be with those common men, anyhow?"

Father answered her, and I could n't hear what he said, but I felt sure he was standing up for his men, for he loved them almost as much as he did his own children.

I made a face at Martha, in the dark, for being a snob. She liked the officers well enough, and when once in a while Mother let her go to one of the dances, she did her hair up high and tried to look as though she were twenty instead of just barely sixteen. Of course she did n't deceive any one, but all the young lieutenants and even some of the older officers liked to dance with her anyhow. She was certainly pretty, with her vivid coloring and dark hair and eyes, and a nose that was

nice and straight instead of turned up like Jimmy's and mine.

Personally I thought most officers were silly fops and could n't see why she wanted to waste time at dances.

I had been thinking all these things as we went out of the house and down the long wooden board walk that led past the mess hall and over to the canteen in one of the barracks that had been the private and exclusive loafing place, since their return from France, of Father's first company, "D" of the -nth Regiment. The rain was pouring down, and it was really cold, although almost the first of April, and I was mighty glad when we reached the warm room.

There was a fire burning in the big stone fireplace, and the air was so thick with tobacco smoke that at first I could n't recognize any one. Then the men saw Father's uniform and sprang to attention; but he grinned, banished formality with a

wave of his hand and moved over to the fire.

“Hey, boys,” some one shouted, “it’s Sergeant Jane! Come along!”

Dad burst out laughing. “So that’s what they’ve christened you, is it?” he asked. “And since when has it been customary to announce a sergeant and ignore a colonel?”

I knew he was only teasing, but some of the men looked embarrassed, so I changed the subject by announcing all in one breath:

“We’ve been ordered to St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands of the United States of America, and Father’s in charge of the Post.”

“Hurrah!” “Bully for him!” “Three cheers for the Colonel!” they shouted, and then, in a regular volley — “Where?” “What?” “When?”

After we had taken off our raincoats and pulled up chairs to the fire, Father told

them all about it, and he made it sound so interesting that I could hardly wait to get there.

But when we got up to leave and the men, embarrassed and awkward, mumbled "sure will miss you" and "hate to see you all leave Norfolk" and such things, I seemed to lose interest in the West Indies. I think Dad did, too; at least he was very quiet walking home and held my arm tight under the big umbrella.

But just as we came to the house, he chuckled to himself and asked why they called me sergeant.

"Company D adopted me for their mascot," I explained. "It was just before they sailed for France. They wanted to make me a captain, but of course I would n't be an officer, so we com-compromised on a non-com."

He laughed some more at that, and insisted upon stopping on the top step and singing:

“Sergeant Jane of the Yank marines,
She fed her men on pork and beans,
Which really were beyond the means
Of a Sergeant in the Army !”

“Which same is no joke in these days of the H. C. L.,” he added, putting down the umbrella.

“Hush, Daddy,” I begged, “Martha might hear you, and she’d make fun of me forever over this Sergeant business.”

“Just as you say, my dear,” he replied, pretending to become suddenly very grave and dignified. “But, since you have joined the marines — Attention, Sergeant Jane.”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, clicking my heels into place.

“You understand that your position demands of you loyal allegiance to your country and your flag, and perfect obedience to your superior officers ?”

“Yes, sir,” I repeated.

“Very well, then. Sergeant Jane, forward march to bed.”

I thought that was taking a mean advantage of a soldier and a lady, but there was nothing to do but obey ; so I shouldered the umbrella and marched into the hall, whistling “Semper Fidelis” with much feeling, if a trifle off the key, to show how I felt about it.

CHAPTER II

I GO TO A DANCE AND LEARN A SECRET

NEARLY a month after we had been ordered to the Virgin Islands, I was having a farewell game of tennis with my old friend, Corporal O'Hara, on the bumpy, grass-filled court back of the mess hall, when Jimmy suddenly appeared around the corner of the building and announced that Mother wanted me to come home.

“Oh, Joshua!” O'Hara grunted. “Ain’t that the worst luck?”

“Maybe I can come back —” I began, but Jimmy interrupted to explain that Mother wanted me “right away and for keepth.” So I promised to try to play again before we left, although I was almost

sure there would n't be a chance, and followed Jimmy reluctantly to the house.

When I got there, everything was so quiet that just dropping my racket on the floor sounded like the beginning of a barrage. Mother stuck her head over the railing with a warning "sh!" and beckoned me mysteriously to her room.

"Jane," she asked, when I had stepped inside and closed the door after me, "where have you been? Don't you know that the Junior Officers' dance is to-night and I told you girls that you could n't go unless you rested this afternoon? Martha is sleeping now."

"Oh, Joshua!" I burst out, without thinking. "Is that what you made me stop in the middle of a deuce set for? I 'm not going to take a nap, because I 'm not going to the dance. Oh, Joshua!"

"What a ridiculous expression, Jane! You must n't use it. And of course you 're going to the dance. It 's the last thing

given in our honor before we leave, and they will feel hurt if the whole family is n't there."

"But I 've been to two teas and that deadly reception and the school concert, and I can't stand another thing, Mother. Please let me go play with O'Hara and stay home this evening."

"You 're a funny child, Janey. I don't believe many girls of thirteen would beg to stay away from a military dance. I don't like to make you go if you don't want to, dear, but you need only stay long enough to speak to some of the people, and it will be the last dance you 'll have to worry about for a long, long time. Next time you go to one, you 'll have to beg for permission."

"Then next time will be never," I muttered. "All right, I 'll go shake hands with the silly fops this once more."

And I stalked out of the room before Mother could scold me for saying silly

fops, which is English and very expressive but not supposed to be used about officers.

I lay down on my bed and tried to forget my troubles in a detective story, but before the corpse-to-be had even been shot, in walked Martha, dressed in her best rose-colored kimono and a boudoir cap she had resurrected from goodness knows where. At first I didn't say a word, for I knew she was just trying to get me excited, but when she sat down at my dressing table and began rubbing massage cream into her face, I could n't stand it any longer.

"Of all vain creatures, Martha Graves," I exploded, "you take the first prize! Curlers and cold cream, and next I suppose you 'll be using rouge. Oh, Joshua! You make me sick!"

"My dear Jane, where do you pick up such expressions?" Martha looked at me the way Mrs. General Payne does at any poor unfortunate woman who happens to

take her favorite seat in chapel, only a dab of cold cream on her chin and the bumpy knobs under the boudoir cap rather spoiled the effect. "Really, I can't understand why Mother lets you associate with those dreadful men and learn to use such vulgar expressions."

"I did *not* learn it from them, and they are n't dreadful and it's not vulgar," I replied indignantly.

"Well, where did you hear it then?"

"Why — why — I heard an officer say it this very afternoon; that's where I heard it. It's his favorite expression." (O'Hara's as much of an officer, in my opinion, as the General himself, but I did n't think it necessary to explain this to Martha.)

She evidently took the officer for what he was worth, as she did n't say anything further on the subject. Instead she began talking about the dance, and the Latin exam to-morrow, and how she hated to

leave Norfolk, and wondering whether there would be any saxophones in the band that night and whether there would be any nice people at St. Thomas. Martha is so funny when she gets started on a dozen different subjects at once that you can't help laughing at her, and when she pulled off her cap and stood all her curlers on end and did what she called a Virgin Island cakewalk, we both giggled so much that Mother came in and scolded us for not resting.

When Martha forgets to pretend she's grown up and does n't remember how attractive she is, I don't know a better sport. But by the time we were ready to start over to the dance that evening, her memory was in extra good working order, and in a frilly pink and white organdie, with her hair done in imitation of her favorite movie actress, she looked at least eighteen.

Father, coming down the stairs in all the blue and red and gold glory of his full dress, pretended to stagger with surprise.

“Who is this, Mother? I don’t believe I’ve been introduced, have I?” he asked, bowing politely to Martha, who blushed and told him not to be silly and please to come along, it was half-past eight.

The officers’ mess hall was hung with flags, and there were flowers and ferns in all the corners. The Marine Band was tuning up on a raised platform at one end of the floor, which was already half filled with officers and Norfolk girls. The bright-colored dresses and the uniforms moving around together looked mighty pretty, I thought. Even the dignified receiving line had splashes of color in it. My own family had been installed at the head of the line and it was fun to watch Father’s courtly bow and the gracious smile Mother gave to new arrivals.

If you could come to them as a disembodied spirit, dances might not be so bad, I decided. And the next minute I found myself, dreadfully conscious of a

much too childish white dress and squeaky patent-leather slippers, being dragged out of the friendly shelter of the dressing room and into the very midst of the receiving line by my heartless sister.

For what seemed like endless hours, we stood side by side and shook hands with benevolent old colonels and their stately wives, with brisk, hearty majors and foppish lieutenants, and with pretty girls and more foppish lieutenants, and with captains, and with the General and Mrs. General, and with still more lieutenants.

Finally some of the lieutenants took Martha away and began dancing with her. After I had danced dutifully with Father and several nice but rather stout majors, Mother took pity on me and promised that if I would sit down beside her for just a few minutes, Father would take me home.

But before Father could get away, a plump, warm-looking, little lieutenant

named Chase came trotting over to me, with another man, bigger and darker and not so overheated, in tow.

“This is Lieutenant Duncan, Redhead,” he remarked patronizingly and disappeared.

“I’ve been hoping to meet you, Miss Graves,” the Duncan person began. “I’ve heard a lot about you, you know.”

He was an especially young lieutenant and especially good-looking, so I knew that he must be even more than ordinarily conceited and foppish, and I didn’t care how rude I was.

“You probably refer to my sister, Martha,” I said coldly. “She’s over there by the punch bowl. I’m Jane; and I’m going home now, anyhow.”

“But it’s Jane I’m looking for,” he answered, laughing and screwing up his face until he didn’t look so hopelessly handsome, after all. “Sergeant Jane, that is. I bring greetings to her from Corporal Timmons.”

“Timmons!” I cried, forgetting to be even cool. “Where is he? How is he? Does he remember me?”

“He’s stationed at the Marine Barracks at St. Thomas and was extremely hale and hearty the last time I saw him, some ten days or so ago. As for remembering you — I should say about two thirds of his conversation was on the subject of Sergeant Jane and the glorious glory of Company D!”

Lieutenant Duncan grinned to himself at the thought of Timmons’s conversational limits.

“Oh, Joshua! Is n’t that great?” I grinned back. “Just to think of his being in the Virgin Islands. He’s one of my oldest friends and was in Father’s favorite company, and we lost track of him after he was wounded in France and have n’t seen him or heard from him for ages. Please tell me all about him. And tell me all about St. Thomas, because we’re going there soon.”

“That’s rather a large order, but I’ll do my best,” he promised. “That is, of course, if you don’t mind not going home just yet?”

I knew he was laughing at me, but I did n’t care, I was so anxious to hear about Timmons, and besides, Mr. Duncan was the most human lieutenant I had ever met. I even danced with him a couple of times, when he said he would have to be bribed to give away any information of value to the enemy.

Then I told Father that Lieutenant Duncan would take me home, and after I had found my cape, we went over and sat on the front steps of our house and talked.

“Timmons was discharged from the hospital before the armistice was signed,” he told me. “But he was transferred to a different company, and after he came home was stationed for a little while at Philadelphia and then sent to St. Thomas. He

knows that you all are coming down there and is just about counting the days.

"He's making you a present, too," he concluded. "But that's a secret."

I begged him to tell me what it was, but instead he began talking about his own experiences during the six months he was at St. Thomas, helping to supervise the renovation of the old barracks and the building of new ones, and putting in electric lights and a garage and a new wharf and all sorts of improvements.

"You see, I was an engineer before I joined the marines," he explained. "After the war was over, I decided to stick to the service and, as a reward, I guess got sent to the Virgin Islands."

"Did you like St. Thomas so much?" I asked in surprise.

"Crazy about it. But you'll see why for yourself when you get there, and I'm not going to spoil it for you by telling you too much beforehand."

"I 'll probably hate it," I replied, just to be contrary. "I don't want to leave Norfolk a bit."

"Just wait until you 've spent a month in Charlotte Amalie and see if you don't love it," he prophesied. "Now come along and dance the rest of the dances with me."

"What for?" I demanded. "You are n't going to tell me anything else, and I 'm sleepy."

"I see it 's my turn to bribe," he chuckled. "Suppose I told you a St. Thomas secret that nobody else in this whole wide world knows anything about?"

"Then I would dance all you wanted me to," I assured him promptly.

"All right, Sergeant Jane. It 's a go. But first you must swear to solemn secrecy."

"Just how do you do that?" I asked doubtfully.

"Kneel down on the lowest step," he commanded. "Lower your head until it

touches the step above and repeat the alphabet backwards."

I did it as well as I could for giggling; and then he told me to stand on the ground below him with my hands behind my back and my feet crossed.

"Now," he ordered sternly, when he had me fixed to suit him, "say after me slowly :

"If ever this secret I betray
Then sky-blue-pink may I turn next day!"

"Then sky-blue-pink may I turn next day," I repeated meekly. "But why not until the next day?"

"That's irrelevant and irreverent," he replied sternly. "Sit down."

I was beginning to be afraid that all this nonsense was because there really was n't any secret, but as soon as I had seated myself beside him on the steps, he began in a mysterious half-whisper :

"Once upon a time there was an organization known as the Danish West Indies

Company. It was a wealthy and powerful company, with headquarters in Denmark and branches in all the Danish colonies in the West Indies. An especially successful commerce was being carried on with its flourishing settlement in St. Thomas.

“And then one day, out of a clear sky, the British fleet (which was then, as now, the largest in the world and did n’t leave many places unvisited) came sailing into the harbor at Charlotte Amalie, with guns booming and flags flying. The peaceful and wholly unprepared Danes put up only the feeblest resistance, and the British soon took possession of St. Thomas, as well as of its sister islands, St. John and St. Croix.

“The people were unhappy and dissatisfied under English occupation, but fortunately it lasted less than a year, for in 1802, by the Treaty of Amiens, the islands were given back to Denmark.

“But the Danes had learned a lesson and decided that no enemy would catch them

unprepared again. On the water front of Charlotte Amalie stood a great red fort that had been erected way back in the seventeenth century by Governor Iverson. They strengthened its walls, fashioned new loopholes and brought in cannon until it fairly bristled. Then they sat down to wait for the British to start something again.

“And sure enough, about five years after their first conquest, back came the English, under Admiral Cochrane. This time the St. Thomians put up a good fight, and even after the town itself had surrendered, a band of men held out against the British for weeks in the fortress, although they were besieged from both land and sea.

“The English evidently found the Virgin Islands a pretty hot proposition to manage, for they handed them back again in 1815, and they have belonged to Denmark ever since — until the United States bought them two years ago.”

“That’s very interesting,” I said politely, as he seemed to have finished, “and I’m sure you would make a fine history teacher. But I don’t see why it’s a secret.”

“Oh, I have n’t gotten to the secret yet,” he assured me. “That was just introduction. How do you suppose those men managed to live in the fort for weeks, when they were cut off from all communication and all supplies?”

“There were n’t any airplanes then, or submarines. I don’t know — unless they had a secret passage of some kind.”

“You’ve guessed it first shot. And finding it again after all these years is the secret.”

“But where did it go? I should think the British would have been all around the fort.”

“They were. But they trusted to the lookouts on the battle ships to watch the side of the tower toward the harbor, and on a dark night a small rowboat could come

quietly along the coast, about a hundred rods from shore, without being noticed either by those lookouts or by the sentries on guard in front of the fortress."

"But where did it land? And how did they get into the fort?"

"There is a narrow strip of land around the building, on which they evidently beached their boats. In one of the walls facing the sea is a cunningly contrived stone door, which opens into a long narrow room or passage. At the other end of this passage is the door leading into the cellar of the fortress."

"That is a regular secret," I admitted. "How did you ever happen to discover the passage, and how did you find out what it had been used for?"

"We were getting ready to use the fort as a hospital and guardhouse for our men, and I was poking around in the cellar to see how damp it was, when I accidentally touched one of the hinges of the secret door.

The key was rusted in the lock on the cellar side. When I finally managed to turn it and get into the room on the other side, I found it as musty and cobwebby as though it had n't been disturbed since the loyal Danes brought up their last load of supplies to their townsmen imprisoned in the fort over a hundred years ago. And I don't believe it had."

"But how did you know about the Danes?" I persisted.

"That's partly guesswork," he admitted with a laugh. "But I talked with a lot of old inhabitants and hunted up some local histories, and I got enough dope to build up my theory."

"And then what did you do?" I asked eagerly.

"Nothing very romantic, I'm afraid. I cleaned out the room in the walls, after I'd located the other end of the passage, of course, and I took down an old rug and some chairs and pillows and

rigged up an electric light, and on blazing hot days I bet I had the coolest loafing place on the whole island. I never told anybody about it, and when I came away I locked it up and left it just as it was, hoping that sometime I could go back and visit it again. But you have the secret, so I'm going to give you the key, too."

And before I could protest he had unbuttoned his coat, taken from around his neck a long chain with a big, old-fashioned key hanging from it and handed the whole thing to me.

"The outer door opens to the touch, on a sort of spring, I suppose, so this is all you need to get into our secret," he said.

"But I don't want to take your key," I protested. "Suppose you come back some day and want to get in."

"Then you'll have to be there to open the door. I have a hunch you will, too. And now let's dance."

We went back to the mess hall and were

just starting to waltz, when I happened to hear Martha's voice, which is rather high and very carrying when she is excited. "Oh, Joshua! Is n't the music gorgeous?" she was exclaiming to her partner.

That made me giggle, and when I began wondering how many times she had used that "vulgar expression" under the mistaken impression that it was the pet slang of some especially witty officer, I laughed until I got entirely out of step. Lieutenant Duncan stopped dancing in disgust and took me over and made me sit down in the corner and explain.

He roared when I told him about it, and said that he was going to ask Martha to dance with him, and when she sprang her "Oh, Joshua!" he was going to say very ecstatically: "Oh, Miss Graves, how did you know my first name?"

But before he had a chance to try it, the band began playing "Good Night, Ladies,"

and Mother suddenly appeared and hauled me into line to shake hands all over again and say what a lovely time I had had.

Before I went to bed I took the key off the chain, which was too heavy to wear, and put it around my neck on the blue ribbon out of my nightgown. I started to put it down my back, to act as a cure for nosebleeds in case I ever had any, but I was afraid Martha would see it when she fastened my button-in-the-back dresses, so I let it dangle romantically over my heart.

CHAPTER III

ON BOARD THE *GUIANA*

WE sailed from New York on the *Guiana* on the fifteenth of May.

But first we went up and stayed for a week at one of the big hotels, so that we could buy clothes and other things that we thought would be hard to get in the Virgin Islands.

Mother bought us both Norfolk suits with plaid skirts and dark blue coats, to wear on the boat, and blue sailor hats to match, and new capes and shoes and stockings and all sorts of thin dresses, — voiles and ginghams and pongees and other materials I did n't even know the names of. Martha said it was almost as good as getting a trousseau, but I told her I felt more like

an explorer, collecting his outfit for a plunge into some savage wilderness.

When we were n't shopping, we went to the theater or the Hippodrome or the movies, or walked up and down Fifth Avenue, looking at the people and the shops, and stopping every now and then for a fudge sundae at Huyler's or hot chocolate and English muffins in some specially quaint or attractive tearoom. Daddy kept saying that we were "tasting our last for some time of the fruits of civilization, and we had better make the best of them", and we took him at his word.

One afternoon Mother had to have a suit tried on, and Father was tending to some official business, so we decided to take Jimmy to the Zoo. It was lots of fun, but nothing exciting happened until we were coming home. Then people were shoving so to get on the trolley car that Martha and Jimmy were pushed in ahead of me, and the conductor suddenly shut the door

in my face and gave the signal to start. I was wondering what in the world I was going to do, as I did n't have a cent with me, when the car, which was just beginning to get under way, stopped with an awful jerk, and the door flew open. The conductor stuck his head out, beckoned to me and shouted, "Jane! Jane!"

I was so astonished I just stood there until some one gave me a friendly boost, and I was squeezed on to the platform of the car. All the passengers were grinning, and some of them laughing out loud, and Martha was standing there, looking very stiff and dignified and clutching Jimmy, who stammered and giggled and finally overcame her frantic attempts to keep him from speaking.

"Thithter, thithter, oh, Jane," he stammered, "when thithter thaw you were thut out, the thaid to the conductor — 'Pleath, conductor, pleath let Jane get on; the hath n't any money!'"

Of course Martha denied it outright, but the conductor had certainly called me Jane, and we teased her about it until she blushed at the sight of a blue uniform with brass buttons.

When the fifteenth finally came, a lot of Father's friends and some of the marines from Norfolk, who had come up to New York on leave, were down at the wharf to see us sail. As the ship moved slowly into the harbor, behind her busy little tug, we stood at the rail and waved and waved until we could n't see a single khaki-clad figure. Then we waved to the Woolworth Building and the Metropolitan tower and the whole good, old sky line and began to feel homesick and blue and lonely, until Jimmy, giving one last flip of his cap for good measure, shouted blithely :

“Hi, everybody, come on down to the thateroomth and thee all the thtuff !”

“Yes, we 'd better go get our things straightened out a little,” Mother agreed

with a smile, although I was sure I had seen her wipe away a perfectly good tear the moment before.

We all went tumbling down the stairs and found our three staterooms piled with flowers and baskets of fruit and boxes of candy.

“Um’m — chocolate peppermints!” I cried, opening a big box bearing my name. The envelope inside was addressed to “Sergeant Jane,” and I hastily stuck it in the pocket of my coat, but the rest of the family were too busy with their own packages to notice. The card was Lieutenant Duncan’s, and on the back of it was written “Good luck and bon voyage to the Wearer of the Key!”

I hurriedly felt for the key and found it safe, and then and there resolved to explore the passage as soon as I got to St. Thomas and to write Lieutenant Robert James Duncan all about it.

By the time we had put the flowers in

water, sampled most of the other presents and unpacked a few of our belongings, the gong rang for dinner, and as we hurried down to the dining saloon we began to feel that we were really on our way to the Virgin Islands.

None of us had been on a big steamer since we came up from the Philippines six years before, so Jimmy and I explored every inch of the boat from the bridge to the engine room and had long talks with the purser and the second officer, a Mr. Blum, who was red-faced and jolly and said he had a little boy just Jimmy's age.

"Can't you have it a little rougher for uth, thir?" Jimmy asked him politely, the second day out, for the sea had been as smooth as a lily pond.

Mr. Blum threw back his head and roared good-naturedly at Jimmy's request. "Well, Sonny," he said gravely, after a minute's consideration, "I don't believe

I have much influence in that direction myself, but I could introduce you to the wireless operator."

"Oh, could we thee him?" Jimmy asked delightedly, and I did n't hang back either when Mr. Blum said, "Sure thing; come along", and started up the stairs.

We followed him to a little room opening on to the upper deck, where a young man, with red hair and thousands of freckles was sitting in front of a table covered with instruments and papers and rolls of something that looked like the ticker tape I had once seen in a broker's office.

"Here are some friends of mine, McKinney," said the second officer. "They would like to talk to you a little, if you can spare the time."

"Sure, it 's time I have plenty of just now," McKinney grinned amiably. "And what can I be after doing for you?"

"Could you tell us a little about the wireless and show us how it works?" I

asked eagerly, for I had never been so close to one before.

“And Mithther Blum thaid maybe you could thee about having the weather a little rougher,” Jimmy added bashfully, as the kind-hearted second officer left us to go back to his duties.

“Faith, and it’s the right station you’ve called this time, both of you,” the operator assured us. “This, you’ll notice, is my highly educated young transmitter,” he said, pointing to one set of instruments. “It sends out the messages for me. And here’s my faithful receiver that takes them in as fast as the best.”

“But I thought it was a wireless telegraph, and there are a lot of wires!” I exclaimed in surprise.

“Sure, those are the wires that make the current,” he explained. “But once the messages are started, they’re carried by waves of electricity through the air. Watch, now; I’m going to tap this little key.”

As he pressed his finger lightly on the key, there was a loud cracking noise, and a bright spark leaped between the two brass knobs in which the wires ended.

“Goodneth!” cried Jimmy. “What wuth that?”

“That was a dot,” said McKinney, laughing, “and this is a dash.” He touched the key again, this time making a regular stream of sparks between the knobs. “That’s how we spell out our messages — dot, dash, dash, that’s W. I’m calling the Washington station up on the Potomac to see about the weather for the young gentleman.”

Fascinated, we watched him tap out the letters over and over again. Suddenly one of the other instruments began tapping of its own accord.

“It ’th the retheiver!” Jimmy shrieked.

“Right you are,” answered McKinney. “We’ve got them now.” And he began rapidly tapping out his message on the key.

Soon he stopped, and turning to the receiver, picked up the end of the roll of paper tape connected with it.

“When the waves they ’ll soon be sending back to us in reply to our questions reach this little glass tube (which is called by the name of coherer),” he told us, pointing to the different things as he mentioned them, “those bits of nickel and silver floating around in there between the two plugs join together and by so doing make it possible for the current to pass on through them and through these various wires and magnets until it sets this inker moving.”

And sure enough, in a few minutes the filings suddenly flew together, and the inker began tapping on the roll of tape, which unwound of its own accord as the message grew longer.

“How does it know what to tap?” I asked.

“Each wave of electricity that makes it move corresponds with a dot or a dash

made in that other wireless station. Here," he said, as the tapping ceased, tearing off the tape and handing it to me, "you and the boy can spell this out for yourselves while I get off some other messages."

He pulled up two chairs for us on the opposite side of the table and gave me a little red book, open at a page of dots and dashes.

"It 'th the Morthe code," Jimmy whispered reverently, as we bent our heads together over the little black marks. "I feel jutht like a detective thtory."

Slowly and with frequent assistance from our agreeable Irish friend, we spelled out the message, and I wrote it down :

"Weather cloudy in Eastern and South-eastern States. Storm center moving down from the Great Lakes. Also indications of heavy winds from north during next twenty-four hours."

"Looks as though you 'll be having a bit of a blow yet, young man," McKinney

remarked, when we had finished. "And then we 'll have a chance to see what sort of a sailor you are."

"I 'm not any kind of a thailor," Jimmy retorted indignantly, "I 'm a marine."

And after that I naturally had to explain who we were and where we were going.

"Well, well, so you 're bound for St. Thomas." The wireless operator squinted his eyes reflectively. "It 's an extremely pretty spot; but I don 't believe I 'd want to live there all year round. Still, they 're talking of putting in a big wireless station, and in that case I might consider it." He patted the coherer lovingly and became greatly embarrassed when I tried to thank him for his kindness.

"Come again, come again!" he shouted after us as we left. "Next time I 'll teach you how to send a message yourselves."

"Wath n 't that fun, Jane?" demanded Jimmy, skipping along the deck to relieve his feelings. "If I were n 't going to be a

general of the marineth or a cowboy I think I 'd be a wireleth operator."

"I 'd like it myself," I admitted. "Only it would have to be on a boat. I adore everything about boats — the little boxes of staterooms, and the shiny white decks, and the portholes, and the smell of the ocean."

"And the good thingth to eat," Jimmy added, sniffing the air hungrily. "Don't you think dinner mutht be motht ready?"

After dinner we sat in our steamer chairs, and Father told us about the transports and the part the wireless played in fighting the submarines and in the maneuvers of the battleships, and about brave operators who had to stick to their posts while the ship was sinking. Jimmy was keenly interested at first, but he fell asleep in the middle of the last story, and Father had to carry him to his stateroom. It was so cold and windy by that time that we all decided to turn in early.

It seemed as if I had just fallen asleep

when Martha woke me up by shouting my name over and over again. I tried to lean out of my berth to see her, but she was directly under me, and the ship was rolling so that I nearly fell out on my head.

"What's the matter?" I demanded.

"I'm dying," she announced dramatically. "But it does n't make any difference, because the ship is sinking anyhow."

"You're probably just seasick," I called down to her. "This is n't anything; it's just a — a — a bit of a blow."

A hollow groan was the only answer to these words of comfort, so I decided I'd better investigate. Waiting until the state-room was somewhere nearly on a level (the boat really was tossing around in a most unsettling manner), I turned over on my face and cautiously slid down until my feet could touch the edge of Martha's berth. Just as I reached it, the boat gave an awful lurch and threw me right on top of my beloved sister. I landed with both arms

around her neck, but I did n't stay in that affectionate position long, for with an awful yell she tried to push me away and, losing her balance, as we went head on into another wave, succeeded in landing both of us with a mighty bump on the floor of the stateroom.

Martha was first to recover her breath. Sitting up with great dignity (and on my left leg), she rubbed the back of her head and demanded ferociously what I "meant by it."

"Wow! Get off my leg, can't you!" I howled, trying to kick her away. "What 'd I mean by what?" I was still flat on my back and not feeling particularly affable.

"By jumping on top of me and waking me up, of course," she snapped back. "I suppose that 's your idea of a joke."

"You 're the one who did the waking up, Martha Graves," I replied indignantly, "and you know it perfectly well. You

called me and said you were dying and the ship was sinking and — ”

“I did no such thing.”

“You did.”

“I did n’t. You dreamt it.”

“I did not. You must have been talking in your sleep.”

We glared at each other fiercely; and then, at the same moment, burst out laughing. It was so silly to be sitting, with nothing on but our nightgowns, on a state-room floor that stood first on one end and then on the other, in the middle of the night and of the Atlantic ocean, fighting about which one of us had been having a nightmare.

We climbed back into our berths without another word and were soon asleep again. Next morning, although I was sure that Martha had really called me, I decided not to mention it to the rest of the family and tried to hide the stiffness in my left leg and shoulder that was the natural result of my

sudden close contact with the stateroom floor. Martha, also, had nothing to say on the subject, but I noticed her rubbing the back of her head several times when she thought no one was looking.

The boat was still rolling quite a lot, and the waves looked tremendously high and savage. Jimmy was much impressed by the "storm", until he had paid an early morning visit to McKinney, after which he spoke of it contemptuously as a "pocket of wind" and strode around the decks with a carelessness that brought him a couple of hard bumps.

We all enjoyed the rough weather and were sorry when, late in the afternoon, the wind died down, and the waves flattened out into harmless little swells.

But the last two days of the trip passed only too quickly. We stopped at Porto Plata and went on shore for a couple of hours while they unloaded freight from the steamer.

“I never saw such a clean city in all my life,” Martha had exclaimed when she first made out its houses and streets from the upper deck of the boat. And when we had walked around it for a while, we found that it was just as clean as it looked. Most of the houses were white and very small, with little patches of bright green grass in front of them, so that it looked like nothing in the world so much as a dolls’ toy village.

“These people could teach a few things to some of our would-be municipal reformers and contractor street cleaners,” Father remarked, and every one agreed with him.

The steamer also stopped at Guantanamo and Port au Prince, but not long enough to go on shore, so we had to content ourselves with throwing pennies to the little brown boys who came out in canoes to dive for them. They were wonderfully quick and clever, and I saw Jimmy watching them with such open-eyed interest that I sus-

pected another life-ambition was being born, and we would have to watch that he did n't drown himself at the first opportunity.

At last, on the sixth morning out, just at daybreak, St. Thomas was sighted. We all hurried into our clothes and rushed down for a bite of breakfast before we should reach the island.

CHAPTER IV

CHARLOTTE AMALIE

CHARLOTTE AMALIE, the harbor of St. Thomas, is on the south side of the island. As the steamer slowly made its way up the channel, we saw that St. Thomas itself was long and narrow, with flat meadows along the coast that sloped back into high, irregular hills. Surrounding it were a great number of tiny islands, some grass-covered and some rocky.

The second officer, who had joined us on the upper deck, told us some of their names, — Water Island, Hans Lollick, Little Hans Lollick, Thatch Cay.

“Over there,” he said, pointing to the southwest, “is Sail Rock. You can’t see

it very well from here, but looking at it on the eastward side, you might easily mistake it for a vessel under sail.

“There’s a local yarn about it that’s rather good,” he went on, seeing that we were interested. “It seems that a French frigate was sailing these waters a good many years ago and one rather dark night passed close to a vessel that was showing no lights. The captain thought he had come across a privateersman, and he hailed the stranger.

“‘Ship ahoy! What name and where bound?’ he shouted.

“‘Ship ahoy! What name and where bound?’ came the reply very faintly.

“Indignant at this impertinence and not being able to get any satisfactory answer to his question, the captain ordered his men to fire. The booming noise that greeted his first volley convinced him that the privateersman was giving battle, and soon a couple of cannon balls landed on his deck.

He was furious at this and gave orders to keep up the fight to the finish.

“When dawn came, the Frenchmen found themselves firing away at Sail Rock. The supposed answers to the captain’s hails had been the echoes from the rocks and so had the sounds of return cannonading, while some of the Frenchmen’s balls had ricocheted from Sail Rock at such an angle as to return to their own decks. Needless to say, they beat a hasty retreat from the neighborhood, but some one must have been a witness to their blushes, for the story still persists.”

Just as Mr. Blum finished speaking, we rounded a last promontory and were in the harbor. The sun had not been up for long, and there were still great masses of pink and lavender clouds in the eastern sky. The water in the harbor was a clear, bright blue, and between that blue and the dark green of the hills rising in the background lay Charlotte Amalie. Every house in the

town seemed a different color, blue, red, orange, lavender, — and down by the water front rose the great red walls of Christian's Fort.

"There she is!" the second officer's voice boomed in the sudden silence that had fallen on us all. "Charlotte Amalie — the sweetheart of the West Indies. Do you wonder they call her that?"

"Indeed I don't," Father replied almost reverently. "It makes me think of a handful of precious stones spilled out on a piece of green velvet."

"Or a greenhouse full of many kinds of flowers," Mother suggested. "We loved the little coast towns of Italy, Stan, but Charlotte Amalie seems to be all that they were and more, too."

We spent the time until we reached the wharf pointing out to each other new color combinations in the houses, whose roofs seemed always to be of scarlet; the narrow, winding streets that straggled up from the

water front, so steep sometimes that steps were cut in them; the gray ruin on a hill above the town, which Mr. Blum told us was Bluebeard's castle, and the dazzling whitewashed fences around the gardens of the hillside villas.

But the thing that looked best to us as we came down the gangplank was a company of our own blessed marines! They were drawn up at attention, and the Major who had been temporarily in charge of the Post, awaiting Father's arrival, was at their head. He saluted Father and then shook hands with him and with all of us, gave orders about our baggage and escorted us to the big, rather battered-up-looking car that was waiting for us.

“There are a good many of us at the barracks,” he explained, patting the side of the car, “and the one jitney we have is kept pretty busy. This old lady has rather lost her good looks on these rotten roads, but she still can go — eh, Sergeant?”

The sergeant had been bending over the engine, but now he stood up straight and saluted. When I saw his wrinkled, brown face and merry blue eyes, I forgot all about formality and regulations and ran to him with both hands out. The Major looked astonished, but Father grinned and evidently explained, for soon he, too, was shaking hands warmly with the long-lost Timmons.

We finally managed to get ourselves and our suit cases and the Major and Timmons all securely packed into the car and started up one of the narrow streets.

“This is Main Street,” the Major announced, as we turned to the right down a somewhat wider thoroughfare that had no sidewalks but was well supplied with electric lights. “Thought you’d like a glimpse of the town.”

For a few minutes we were kept busy trying to take in every detail of the houses and shops we passed and still have time

to glance at the grinning, brightly dressed colored men and women, and the occasional white man abroad at this early hour.

“The Post is really in the town,” the Major was explaining to Father, as we left the shopping district behind. “We often let the men come in to the theater and the stores. They seem to get along splendidly with the people.”

“Oh, yes, indeed, there’s a theater,—the Apollo, in Coconut Square. A local stock company has just been organized and seems to be making a great hit.”

“I believe there are churches of almost every denomination. (This was in reply to a question from Mother.) The Roman Catholic, the Lutheran and the Anglican are the largest and — But here we are!”

Sure enough, the automobile had turned into a narrow driveway, between two whitewashed fences, where a marine doing sentry duty would have been sign enough that we had indeed arrived, even if the long

white buildings ahead could have been anything but barracks.

The drive led around the barracks, past a big, well-kept grass plot, and ended at the front (only it turned out to be the back) of three houses. Like the Three Bears, one house was big, one was medium-sized and one was little. But they were all white, with green blinds and low green roofs, and they all looked out across a flower garden to the ocean, which was only a few hundred feet away.

“We land you at your back door,” apologized the Major, “but I can at least take you in at the front.” And he led us down a flagstone path beside the biggest house and across a broad, shady porch into a wide door that stood hospitably open.

“What a duck of a room!” Martha exclaimed, as she stepped inside, and I had to agree with her for once.

The living room ran the whole length of the house and had four big windows on the

ocean side. In the opposite wall was a stone fireplace, and the comfortable-looking wicker furniture was upholstered in rose and brown to match the curiously-patterned rug on the floor. There were bowls of flowers around the room and a pile of magazines on the table.

“How wonderfully homelike!” Mother cried in delight. “Who did all this for us?”

“Every one in the Post wanted to help get ready for the Colonel and his family,” the Major replied, evidently delighted at her pleasure. “But it was Mrs. Hunter who put on the finishing touches. It takes a woman for that, and she’s the only one here now. She and Captain Hunter and their two youngsters live in that house on your right, and Captain Mitchell, Captain Brown and I keep bachelor quarters on the other side. Mrs. Hunter will be mighty glad to have another woman here. I guess she’s been pretty lonely since our last married man pulled out, with that bunch of

‘duration-of-the-war’ enlistments. I know you ’ll like her.”

“I ’m sure I shall,” Mother agreed heartily. “I can hardly wait to thank her for this lovely welcome.”

“Oh, she ’ll be over as soon as you ’re settled a bit. And now I ’ll be running along myself, to give you a chance in that line. The men will be right up with your trunks and things, and Sam there in the kitchen has some chow ready for you if I ’m not much mistaken. Au revoir, everybody. See you later, Colonel !”

The Major saluted and departed, in the midst of a chorus of thanks, and with one accord we dropped down on the nearest chairs to get our breath.

“Is n’t he nice ?”

“Is n’t the house adorable ?”

“Is n’t Charlotte Amalie the most picturesque —”

But before we could even begin to compare impressions, the door on the right of the

fireplace slowly opened, and a beaming black face appeared, shortly followed by a long, thin figure in immaculate white ducks.

“I’s Sam,” the apparition announced. “I has somethings for you to eat if you like.”

“Indeed we do like, Sam,” Father told him. “But give us about five minutes to take off our hats and coats and wash our faces.”

We went racing upstairs and discovered two big bedrooms and a bath in the front of the house, and the same in the back, with a storeroom and a little sewing room in between at the ends of the hall.

“Which ith whothe? Which ith whothe?” Jimmy demanded, hopping from one foot to the other in his excitement.

“I guess Father and I will take this one,” Mother decided, ending her tour of inspection in one of the front rooms that was papered in gray and hung with blue

curtains. "Martha can have the pink room next door; Jane the yellow one in the back of the house, and Jimmy the room with the little brass bed. You can see the ocean from every room, so there ought n't to be any jealousy."

"There won't!" we all shouted.
"That's just the one I wanted."

Mother would have been a good delegate to the Peace Conference.

The breakfast Sam served us was so delicious that we forgot all about its being the second one we'd had that morning, and Jimmy and I were very much surprised when we got stuck at the tenth in a free-for-all biscuit race.

Timmons dropped in just as we had finished, and so did our trunks, but Mother let me go for a walk around the Post and said I could unpack later.

"Them's the barracks, Sergeant," Timmons commenced, very much pleased with his rôle of guide. "Them tents down

by the water," he pointed to two long rows of khaki-colored tents to the left of the driveway, "is where the boys mostly sleeps, exceptin' during the rainy season."

"When 's that?" I asked.

"Mostly from August to November, they say. I 've only been here since January, but I seen a right smart bit of rain falling early this month. They say it won't rain none now till the first of August. That 's when it 's hottest here, too, they say — the first of August to the end of October. Hot and rainy both to once; seems sort of funny, but so they say. Anyhow, that 's when the schools close, and people go up to the hills."

"Don't the schools close till the first of August?" I questioned surprised.

"That they don't. And they open the first of November — at least, so they tell me. But here now is where they show us movin' pictures every night, except when they forget to send us any down from New

York. They plays basketball here, too, and over on the P'rade grounds football and baseball. Got regular leagues, they have, and some of the games are hot ones, I tell you."

"That 's great, Timmons. May I watch them?"

"Sure, Mike! And we got a couple of tennis courts. They ain't much yet, but they 're shapin' up. I recollect you was partial to that game, and I 've had the boys rolling 'em every day here lately."

"You 're a brick! And I 'll help roll them. Do they ever go swimming?"

"Not just here, Sergeant Jane, there not being no beach, so to speak. But over to Mosquito Bay (he pointed rather vaguely down the coast) there 's a jim-dandy beach, with a dock and a springboard and everything all complete. We run the motor truck over there nearly every afternoon. Then there 's East Point for surf bathin', and Magens over t' other side of the island

and—" He suddenly broke off and without any explanation changed the subject.

"Say, did you happen to run across that black-haired lieutenant who was down here awhile back?" he inquired.

"Lieutenant Duncan? Uh-huh, I surely did. He came to Norfolk just before we left and gave me your messages, and I was mighty tickled to find out you were down here."

"Well, now, was n't that a quincidence! Did he happen maybe to make mention of a little gift I was making for you?"

"Yes, but he would n't tell me what it was. Please tell me, Timmons; I'm crazy to know."

The old man chuckled to himself and slapped his leg. "Crazy, is it?" he said. "Well, you 'll have to be crazy a bit longer, then. For it ain't finished, and you ain't going to see it or hear tell of it till it 's absotively through and completed."

I saw there was no use in teasing him and accordingly reconciled myself to a bit of

watchful waiting, although I was frightfully curious. We walked around a little longer, and he introduced me to a corporal and a couple of privates from his company. Then he said he had to get back to work and, giving me a knowing wink, asked which I liked best — blue or green or red.

“Yellow,” I answered, expecting him to laugh at me for dodging the question.

But he just repeated, “Yellow! Yellow!” and started away without another word.

I went back to our house and found that Mrs. Hunter had been to call and had made a great hit.

“She’s as pretty as a picture,” Martha informed me. “Dark and slender, with big gray eyes. She comes from Virginia and has an adorable Southern accent and wanted to hear all about Norfolk. She has a little girl seven and a boy six, and they are at school, and we’ll have to begin going right away, too, because it isn’t over —”

“Till the first of August,” I interrupted,

anxious to show that she did n't have a corner on all the news.

"But she says she does n't know where we can go," Martha continued serenely, not even stopping to ask how I knew about the first of August. "The grammar schools of Charlotte Amalie are only for the 'Spicks' (that 's what they call the colored people), but there 's a small private school that her children go to, and Jimmy can go there, and he 'll probably be in the same grade with Betty-Ellen (is n't that a darling name?) but it only goes to about the sixth grade, and there are n't any high schools and —"

"Heavens, Martha! don't you ever have to stop and breathe?" I interrupted again. It 's impossible to talk to Martha without interrupting her. "Mother, where are we going to school?"

We were sitting on Mother's bed, watching her take things out of her trunk and put them in the big chest of drawers.

"I have n't talked it over with Father," she told us, "but from what Mrs. Hunter says, the only possible place for girls of your age is a Convent school just outside Charlotte Amalie. Holy Cross, I think it is called. Even there the course only covers the eighth grade, so I don't know what Martha will do. We 'll go over and visit the school to-morrow."

"But don't we have to be Catholics?" I asked.

"No ; they take scholars of any denomination, and even some of the better class 'yellows.' Mrs. Hunter says that the Sisters are very charming."

"I 'll disgrace myself for sure," I predicted gloomily. "I was never in this world intended for a Convent school."

Mother laughed at my doleful expression. "We 'll see about that later," she said. "Now run along and finish unpacking, for we are all to go over to the barracks mess hall for dinner."

CHAPTER V

WE GO TO THE CONVENT SCHOOL

EARLY the next morning Jimmy started off to school with the Hunter children, and Timmons drove Mother and Martha and me over to the Holy Cross Convent on the other side of the town.

It was a low white stone building, built around a court, and except for the cloistered entrance and the crosses on the roof, I would never have suspected that it was a convent.

Just as we drew up, the school bell started to ring, and several children ran shouting up the path and into a door in the left wing of the building. We stared at our future

schoolmates curiously as we followed them slowly along the stone walk.

A very young novice, with smooth light hair and eyes so dark they were almost black, showed us, when Mother had told her our errand, into a small, low-ceilinged room just inside the door.

“Sister Thecla will be with you soon,” she assured us, smiling in the friendliest way. “She is now conducting the opening exercises.”

She spoke with such a quaint little accent that Mother asked if she were not French.

“Yes, Madam, Alsatian,” she replied, evidently much pleased at the question. “My mother and my father came to this island when I was just a baby. They thought to make a great fortune in a sugar plantation that had been left to them by my uncle’s will. But the fortune did not grow so fast as did the family — and now there are ten of us children instead of a great pile of gold. We are all happy though

—oh, *oui!* *Et maintenant*, I am learning, I hope, to be a good teacher.”

“Indeed you are, Nicolette,” a pleasant voice broke in, and looking up we saw a tall, gray-haired nun standing in the doorway. “You wished to see me, Madame?” she asked. “I am Sister Thecla, the head of the school.”

“I am Mrs. Graves,” Mother explained. “My husband has come to take charge of the Marine Base. These are my two daughters, whom I hope you will be able to take into your school.”

“I hope so, too,” the Sister replied cordially, coming into the room and taking our hands in hers. She seemed to be studying us for a moment with her quiet blue eyes, and then she sat down beside Mother and began discussing our preparation and the courses we were to take.

I only half listened to what they were saying, for I could hear Ma’amselle Nicolette’s merry voice in an adjoining room and the

murmured replies of her charges. I was hoping that I would be in some of her classes, when I suddenly realized that Sister Thecla was speaking to me.

"Jane, will you come with me, please," she said, and added, turning to Mother: "From what you say she should fit in perfectly with our oldest class. For her sister we will see about some special courses when I return."

Mother gave me a reassuring smile, and I followed the black-clad figure down the corridor and into a sunny classroom. There were perhaps fifteen girls seated at the small wooden desks and a Sister on a raised platform was reading aloud to them.

"Sister Agatha," said my guide, "this is a new pupil, Jane Graves. She has come all the way from Virginia, and we hope she is going to be happy here."

Sister Agatha was pale and thin and had a receding chin. She screwed her thin-lipped mouth into something that

was evidently intended for a smile and waved her hand at me.

"There is a vacant desk next to Madelon's. Sit down, my dear," she ordered, in a cold, expressionless voice. "We are now having our English period."

Sister Thecla had deserted me, and fifteen pairs of eyes were studying me curiously, so I slipped as quickly as possible into the only empty seat in the room.

Madelon proved to be a pretty, black-eyed, curly-headed girl of about my own age, who smiled at me encouragingly. She looked so much like Nicolette that I started to ask if they were n't sisters, but as she saw me open my mouth she put a warning finger to her lips, winked violently, on the side farthest from Sister Agatha, and lengthened her rosy face into a chinless, tight-lipped grimace there was no mistaking. The next instant she was placidly studying her book, with the primmest of countenances.

I was so surprised that I giggled loudly, but fortunately Sister Agatha had begun to read again, in a harsh, resounding voice that quite drowned out all other sounds.

"Aggie 's a cold-blooded old female, but the rest of them are wonderful."

I jumped nervously at this startling announcement and looked around to see who had spoken. I was at the back of the last row, and the girl in front of me was busily drawing pictures on a pad concealed behind her book of poems. Madelon was still bending over her lessons, the picture of studious attention.

"We have French from Nicolette and Spanish from Sister Dolorosa. Sister Thecla herself teaches us history, but Aggie has us for everything else."

This time I saw Madelon's lips moving, though her expression never changed. I grinned my admiration of the scheme, but hesitated to try it myself.

Then Madelon raised her hand. "Sister Agatha," she asked sweetly, when the flow of poetry had stopped for a moment. "May Jane Graves look on with me until she gets a book?"

"Certainly, Madelon, my dear," was the gracious reply. "That is an excellent idea."

Safe behind the "Golden Treasury" I learned many things from the diplomatic Madelon. She was indeed Nicolette's sister, and there were two boys and another girl between them, and five smaller sisters and brothers. The two oldest boys helped their father on the plantation, but all the rest of the children, except the very youngest baby, were in the Convent School. That was Thérèse, who was sixteen, over in the corner; she herself was fourteen, but small for her age. The school was *très bien* and all the Sisters angels, with the single exception of Sister Agatha, who was apt to be strict.

"But she seems to like you," I remarked,

trying to imitate her way of talking without changing the expression of her face.

“She adores me,” was the modest reply. “She thinks I am her most bright and most lovely pupil. Some day, I fear, she will find me out. *Eh bien ! Eet is fine while eet lasts.*”

Just then Sister Agatha made a sweeping gesture to indicate the parting flight of Shelley’s skylark and turned ominously to the class.

“Why is this a beautiful poem?” she demanded of the room at large, and then, receiving no reply, focused on a single victim.

“Anna Larkin, why is this a beautiful poem?”

A fat, blonde girl stood up reluctantly and shuffled nervously from one foot to the other.

“Why-y-” she began at last, and a groan went up from the entire class. They evidently knew what was going to happen.

“How many thousands of times do I

have to request that you shall not begin a sentence with ‘why’?” Sister Agatha raged. “Answer my question and answer it promptly.”

But poor Anna could only blush and stutter, and finally she burst into tears and collapsed into her seat.

Three other efforts to explain Shelley’s poetical genius (a thing which he himself might have found a bit difficult to do) failed to meet with Sister Agatha’s approval. Then Madelon raised her hand, with just the proper amount of hesitation.

“You may recite, Madelon,” said our teacher, going through the contortions that, for her, registered smiling approval.

Madelon rose to her feet and tossed back her curls.

“‘The Skylark,’ is a beautiful poem,” she announced with great feeling. “Eet is beautiful because of the beautiful thoughts eet contains and because of the beautiful way in which those thoughts are expressed.”

“Beautiful,” murmured Sister Agatha contentedly.

Madelon gave me a tremendous wink. It was the simplest kind of bluffing, and one with which I had had some experience myself.

“Why does this poem inspire us with awe?” was the next question.

I waited until four trembling students had tackled this poser and gone down to ignominious defeat. Then I raised my hand rather slowly.

Sister Agatha did not smile at me, but she did say, quite pleasantly: “Ah, our new pupil is going to answer the question for us.”

Thus encouraged I stood up. The room looked surprisingly large and full of people, and Sister Agatha seemed to be growing taller and more forbidding every second. I gulped once or twice and made a bold start.

“We all find that ‘The Skylark’ fills us

with awe," I proclaimed loftily, "because of — because of —" My mind had suddenly become absolutely blank, but I realized that if I did n't say something I would be ruined forever, so I gulped again and finished my sentence all in one breath — "because of the awful thoughts it contains and the awful way in which those thoughts are expressed."

I knew it did n't sound just right as soon as I had it out, but I was n't prepared for the sickening silence that greeted me. The whole class seemed to be holding its breath, and Sister Agatha's face was like a thundercloud.

"You 've done it now, Jean Graves," Madelon whispered consolingly, as I sank terror-stricken into my seat. "She thinks it 's perfectly awful for any one to say 'awful.'"

"So you choose to make fun of us, Miss Jane Graves —" just as the storm began, the door of the schoolroom opened, and in

walked Sister Thecla, Mother and Martha ; and in the introductions that followed, Sister Agatha forgot me for the time being. Before she had a chance to think of my “awful” recitation again, the bell rang, and we all went into another room to read French with Ma’amselle Nicolette.

Walking home together at noon, Martha and I decided that we were going to like the school immensely.

“Only I know I ’ll never get along with Sister Agatha,” I added. “I got in wrong with her first thing with that old ‘Sky-lark.’”

When I told Martha about it, she seemed to think that it was a great joke, but I noticed that she kept rejoicing because she did n’t have anything except sewing with Sister Agatha.

“Is n’t Ma’amselle Nicolette darling ?” she asked, as we stopped to look into some of the shop windows on Main Street. “I am to take a special French conversa-

tion course from her and a Spanish one from Sister Thecla."

"I'll say you 're lucky," I sighed enviously. "And you only have to go in the mornings. Gee, I wish I were three years older!"

"You 'd better not let Mother hear you saying 'Gee!'" Martha admonished me sternly. "You know she — Oh, look at that queer kind of chocolate candy! Let 's get some."

I had no objections, so we went into the shop, which seemed to be a sort of grocery store and candy stand combined.

"What 's inside of them?" Martha asked, pointing to the round, chocolate-covered candies we had seen through the window.

"Deeferent flavors, Mees," answered the nice-looking colored boy who came forward to wait on us. "Vanil, Feeg, Coc'nut, Lemon, Orange, Jelly — "

"All right, all right!" Martha was willing to take the rest for granted. "What are the ones in this pile?"

He looked puzzled for a second and then quickly turned his back to us, murmuring, "Just a meenut, Mees."

"Feeg," he announced triumphantly, swinging around again and showing his shiny white teeth in a broad grin.

"Give us some of those," said Martha, "and some of the flatter ones. What are they?"

Once more he faced about for a moment and turned back to announce with the politest of bows, "Vanil, Mees! Him, Vanil."

Martha suddenly gave a loud snort and dashed out of the shop. I could n't imagine what had happened, but I paid the boy, took the candy and followed her. She was leaning limply against a fence when I caught up with her, and she started giggling again as soon as she saw me.

"What ever struck you, you poor nut?" I demanded.

"Oh, Jane, did n't you see what he was doing?" she gasped.

“No; what?”

“He turned his back and bit the candy to find out what kind it was, and then he was so killingly polite and pleased with himself when he told us. Oh, dear, do you suppose they do all their business that way in Charlotte Amalie?”

“Do you suppose he gave us the bitten ones?” I giggled.

CHAPTER VI

WHITES AND GREENS

THE Holy Cross school turned out to be all that we had hoped from our impressions of the first day. Madelon and I came to be great friends, and her influence with Sister Agatha kept me from utter disgrace, although I was always getting into scrapes in that worthy lady's classroom.

The other girls, except for the few "Spicks" who kept entirely to themselves, were mostly of English or Danish descent, and they all talked English, although I found they didn't know a bit of American. I taught Madelon a lot of slang, and she tried to return the compliment with some French expressions, which sounded great

when she said them but would n't twist around my tongue. She spoke English perfectly, except that she could n't learn to pronounce "it" anyway except "eet", and it did sound so funny to hear her say "cut eet out" and "can you beat eet."

As a whole the school was dreadfully ladylike and never seemed to get mussed up or dirty. After about a week of walks and sewing bees at recess times, I grew desperate.

"Madelon, I 'm going to start a basketball team," I whispered during a geography lesson and had the satisfaction of seeing her lose her expression of unwavering attention for a minute.

"What 's that?" she asked.

"I 'll tell you all about it at recess," I promised and set to work planning athletic careers for all the girls in the class. It was a real service to humanity, but Sister Agatha rudely interrupted it by asking me to name the zones.

“Forward, guard —” I began absent-mindedly.

“What?”

“Temp’rate, torr’d —” I hastily amended, and she had to admit I really knew them.

When recess came I explained about basketball to Madelon and Mary Deane and two or three others I thought had shown some signs of unreleased “pep.” They all thought it would be great fun to get up a team. Mary Deane said that her cousins in England played all sorts of games at school, and she had always wanted to.

I promised to ask for one of the old balls from the Post and said I thought Father would let some of the men help us fix up baskets in the field back of the school.

“Won’t we have to ask Sister Thecla’s permission?” little Christine Dann suggested timidly.

"You ask her, Jane," they all chorused at once and began dragging me toward the office.

"Oh, I can't! I don't know what to say," I protested. "Mary Deane, you do it."

"What is Mary Deane to do?" asked a quiet voice, as Sister Thecla, hearing us, came smiling to the doorway.

She looked so pleasant and unforbidding that it was n't at all hard to explain to her about basketball at recess and after school, and teams, and bloomers, and what fun it would be and good exercise too. At first she did n't quite understand, but when I had repeated it all slowly, and Mary Deane had told about her English cousins, and all the other girls had said how much they wanted to play, she nodded her head thoughtfully.

"I see no reason why you should n't play this game, if your parents are willing," she decided. "It won't interfere with your

studies, and it is never well to develop our minds at the expense of our bodies. Can you teach the other girls, Jane?"

"I can try," I assured her. "And Martha will help, I know."

"Then you have my permission," she smiled. "I shall be anxious to see you begin."

So that very afternoon Timmons and two men from his company came over to help, and with poles and boards and fish netting and wire we rigged up a couple of unmistakable baskets. Then we whitewashed lines on the field and rolled out some of the worst bumps. When it was finished it looked so inviting that Martha and I could hardly wait to begin and stayed there until it grew dark, throwing fouls and practising guarding each other.

By Wednesday the girls all obtained permission from their parents to play. Martha and I laughed together at the thought of going through such a formality

back in the States, but from the struggles some of the girls reported having with their fathers, the St. Thomians evidently thought basketball was an especially dangerous combination of bull-fighting and rough-and-tumble football, such as they were accustomed to seeing on the parade ground.

Of course I forgot the ball and had to tear back to the barracks for it while the others were dressing. We had tried to explain about middies and bloomers and had even brought ours up to show them, but we were n't sure how successful our efforts had been.

Madelon was waiting at the gate for me when I came panting up with the ball. "Oh, Jean Graves, *dépêches-toi*, beat eet," she cried, grabbing my arm and dragging me after her down the path. "Come on in and look out of the window."

"What 's the hurry?" I gasped. "I 'm out of breath already."

"Take a look," she commanded, stop-

ping at last in front of one of the back windows.

I took several. The future basketball stars of Holy Cross were standing or sitting around the field in various awkward and uncomfortable attitudes. Their costumes would have put a musical comedy chorus to disgrace. No two had bloomers of the same shape, size or color; some hung full and baggy to their ankles, others were skin tight and decidedly above the knees, and they were made of every possible material from velours to organdie. The top pieces varied from gay pink and blue sweaters to dainty lace shirtwaists.

"Oh, Madelon," I giggled. "Did you ever see anything so funny in your life?"

"Never," she confessed. "How about Anna Larkin?"

I hadn't particularly noticed the fat girl, but now I saw that she was dressed in a purple and white striped shirt, that must once have been her father's, and tight

black silk trousers gathered into little ruffles at the ankles. She was standing solemnly in the middle of the field, with her hands crossed behind her, waiting for instructions.

"I can't laugh any more. I'm weak," I spluttered a few minutes later. "H-how does Martha do it?"

For my self-possessed sister had gathered the would-be players around her and was lecturing them, evidently about the rules of the game, while the black-gowned Sisters on the side lines watched her admiringly.

Madelon and I started out several times, after I had finally dressed, and were overcome by fresh fits of laughter at the sight of some new freak of costume, before we reached the field. But I finally managed to keep my face straight long enough to hand over the ball and help choose sides.

And the end of the afternoon we knew that basketball had come to Holy Cross to stay. Not that any of the girls showed

striking aptitude for the game. In fact, with the single exception of Mary Deane, they were hopelessly awkward.

“Catch that ball,” Martha would shriek to the bewildered center on her side, who would let it slip gently through her hands, then stand staring at it.

“Pass it over to me,” I would beg in turn, only to have my partner at forward hang on to the ball with a death-like grip until I was forced to call time on her.

Anna Larkin puffed and panted around the field until her face was almost as purple as her shirt, and Madelon fell down every two minutes and always threw the ball in the wrong direction.

But they all had a perfectly gorgeous time. They had never known anything like it, and they wanted to know more immediately and to keep on playing forever. I was sort of afraid Sister Thecla might think the game too unladylike for her charges, and I knew by the sour expression

on Sister Agatha's face that she condemned it utterly.

However, when we finally persuaded the girls they had had enough for the first day, Sister Thecla called us all together and told us that she only wished she were young enough to play herself, but as long as she could n't she would just say good luck and go to it. (She did n't say it in exactly those words, of course, but that was what she meant.)

So we chose two permanent teams, the Whites and the Greens, with Martha and me, as the only ones who really knew how to play, for the captains. And then, I suppose, each girl went home and told her family what a fine game basketball was and how easily she had learned it and what a good player she was going to be.

"I only wish," Martha sighed, as we were getting ready for bed that night, "I only wish I had had my camera. They 'll never look so funny again because a lot of them

will have regular bloomers to-morrow. Mary Deane discovered that her father had a dozen pairs stuck away somewhere in his store. An agent sent them to him once, with some other girls' clothes, and he never expected to sell them."

"That's a shame," I agreed. "But maybe there won't be a pair big enough to fit Anna Larkin, and she's as funny as all the rest put together."

CHAPTER VII

I AM GIVEN A PRESENT AND INTRODUCED TO AN OLD FRIEND

WE had been at St. Thomas over a month, and I was walking home from school one afternoon, when I heard some one calling me. There was a big wharf in the curve of land just before you turned in to the barrack driveway, which the men used for the marine launch and their own boats. Timmons was standing near the boathouses and waving to me frantically, so I went down to investigate.

He hailed me at the top of his lungs. "She 's done, Sergeant! She 's done!"

"Who 's done?" I shouted back.

"C'mon 'nd see." He grinned, winked

mysteriously and pointed to one of the boathouses. "She's in there," he finally informed me.

"Who, Timmons? Stop teasing."

"C'mon 'nd see," he repeated and led the way, chuckling to himself. "Guess you thought you never was going to get that there present. I cud only work on 'er off 'n on. But she's done now, yessir, and mighty pretty too, if I do say it myself, as made her."

He stopped in front of the last and smallest of the boathouses. "Hurry up and show me," I begged, trying in vain to turn the door-knob.

Slowly and with a great air of ceremony, Timmons drew a key out of his pocket and turned it in the lock. Then he threw open the door, stepped back to let me pass, and announced triumphantly: "There she be!"

On the floor of the boathouse lay a canoe. It was a brand-new canoe, painted

a lovely shade of yellow, varnished to within an inch of its life and completely fitted out with back rests, paddles and even cushions.

“Timmons!” I gasped. “Did you really make that? And is it really for me?”

“Yes ma’am to both of those, Sergeant,” he answered proudly, wrinkling his weather-beaten face into a thousand creases as he grinned.

“You’re an angel from heaven!” I cried. “Oh, I’m so happy I could die in a fit!”

But I didn’t. Instead I hugged Timmons until he was red in the face, and then the two of us sat down on the floor and talked her over. She was so obviously a “her” that, after the first look, I didn’t dream of hurting Timmons’s feelings by saying “it.”

I admired every inch of her inside and out, and Timmons told me how each part

had been made. He had been a boat builder before he joined the marines, he explained, and had n't entirely forgotten his trade.

"I 'd say you had n't forgotten it at all," I disagreed. "I never saw anything so perfectly scrumptious to look at in all my life."

"She ain't just looks," he assured me. "She goes like a bird. I tried her out one night before I put on the paint."

"Let 's try her this minute. Come along, we 'll see what you can do, Miss — Why, Timmons, what 's her name?"

"I thought I 'd leave that for you to pick, Sergeant Jane. She 's yours, and it 's for you to name her. You choose it, and I 'll paint it on."

I climbed into the canoe and, sitting down on one of the seats, pondered deeply.

"You might name her Virginia, after the Virgin Islands," Timmons suggested with a grin.

"Or Tommy, after St. Thomas; or Charlotte, after Charlotte Amalie," I imitated. "Oh, Timmons, I have it! We'll call her The Sweetheart of the West Indies. Does n't that sound great?"

"Well, it might," he admitted cautiously. "But it's a bit long to paint on, not to mention saying."

"You can make small letters," I pleaded. "And we can call her Sweetheart for short. Please, Timmons, I think it's a peachy name."

So the *Sweetheart* was duly christened and started out on her first voyage with her name in neat black letters around her bow.

I had only paddled once or twice before, but Timmons was a good teacher, and the canoe responded so readily to the slightest stroke that we went sailing down the bay in great style. At one of the wharves we stopped and changed places, so that I could learn to paddle stern. The steve-

dores and coal carriers, who were always hanging around the docks, stared after us with their mouths wide open and their eyes shining with mingled envy and curiosity.

We went along beautifully for a few strokes, and I was feeling very proud of my steering, when the canoe turned sharply to the left. I backed water as Timmons directed, only to swing so far to the right that we were headed straight out from shore. And we kept on zig-zagging back and forth in spite of all my efforts to follow a straight line.

“What ever is the matter, Timmons?” I asked in surprise. “It looked easy enough when you were doing it.”

He carefully explained the two steering strokes to me again and made me practice first one and then the other, until I could turn the *Sweetheart* in a second.

“Now you ‘ve got to allow for current and for your partn’r up front paddling

stronger or else weaker than you, and change your stroke accordin''," he instructed me. "But you want to do your steering right in with your regular stroke and not get out of time with the other fellow."

I went at it again and this time was lots more successful, although our course was still rather jerky, and often Timmons had to stop paddling until I got myself straightened out.

"I *am* getting it, don't you think?" I asked anxiously, when we were back opposite our point again.

"Sure, you're getting it fine. Suppose I stop paddlin' and see how she goes." He chuckled as he said it, so I wasn't surprised to discover that the only way I could move along without his help was by tacking from side to side, and even then we seemed fairly to crawl.

"Pretty good, for the first lesson," complimented Timmons, to my surprise, as he

picked up his own paddle again and headed for the landing. "Some day you 'll be handlin' her all by yourself; but don't try it unless there 's some one around to pick you up." And once more he chuckled to himself.

I soon realized the reason for that chuckle, for after about a week of practice, he let me take her out alone, following me, however, in one of the rowboats. The *Sweetheart* felt so light with no one else in her and slid along the top of the water so swiftly, her bow a good three inches in the air, that I felt as though I were flying.

"This is too easy," I thought to myself, looking back pityingly at poor Timmons struggling with his heavy oars several boat-lengths behind me.

Then something went wrong. A sudden breeze or a current caught the bow and whirled it around. I succeeded in bringing it straight again, only to have it turn in the other direction. This zigzagging I

knew of old, and it was bad enough, but suddenly the boat began to go around in circles. The more I paddled, the more persistently she spun around, first in one direction and then in another. The *Sweet-heart* gave a very good imitation of a merry-go-round; too good, for by the time Timmons came to my rescue and towed me home in back of his clumsy old rowboat, I was actually dizzy.

“Oh, dear,” I wailed, greatly discouraged, “I’ll never learn!”

“Sure you will. I’ll make you a double paddle and show you the only fit and decent way for one person to manage one of these skittish contraptions,” Timmons promised.

We put up the rowboat and went out again for a long paddle up to the inlet. It was almost dark when we got back to the wharf, but several of the men were sitting on the edge, smoking and talking and dangling their feet.

“We ’ll put ’er up for you, Sergeant,” one of them offered, giving the *Sweetheart* an admiring stare, and Timmons let him help carry her in. But I had to see for myself that she was safely stowed away for the night, so I followed them to the boathouse, with the rest of the men trailing along behind. There were two of them I did n’t recognize, so I asked Timmons their names. He turned to the taller of the two. “Sergeant Jane,” he began with great formality, “I wants you to meet —”

“Why, it ’s Billy Murdock,” I cried in surprise, holding out my hand to him.

He blushed hotly, stammered a few words and gave me a limp handshake.

“Don’t you remember me, Billy?” I asked, much puzzled, for he had been in my own Company D at Norfolk, and we had been good friends.

“Sure, sure,” he protested nervously. “Awful glad to see you again. How are you? H — how are you?”

"I'm fine," I assured him. "Why have n't you been to see us? We've been here over a month."

"I—I—I—did n't know," he stammered, getting more and more embarrassed. "I—I guess I did n't see you."

"But you must have known Father was in command of the Post, and that he is always anxious to see any of the men from Company D."

"Sure, sure," he muttered again. "Of course. I was coming. Just had n't got 'round to it. Gotta go back to the barracks now. See you again." And with that he disappeared.

I stood staring after him, with my mouth wide open.

"What's the matter?" asked Timmons, who had been making things shipshape in the boathouse. "Don't mind that Murdock fellow; he's a queer one."

"He never used to be queer," I objected. "Up at Norfolk he was the jolliest, liveliest

boy in the company. All the men were crazy about him."

"Well, they 're not any more, Miss," put in the swarthy little marine who had been standing with Billy when I first noticed him. "He 's a rum one, he is."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing bad about him, y' understand, but rummy, downright rummy," he explained, and all the others grunted or nodded their agreement.

"Has he been here long?" I asked.

"Ever since we have. He was with us over in France, too. Came in with some replacements just before we got into that scrap at Belleau Woods; 'bout this time last year, it was. He 'd been sick or something and got left behind his own crowd. Had a pal with him, though, tow-headed chap, sort of chunky."

"Jim Wilson?" I guessed.

"Yeah, something like that. Thick as thieves they were, and this Murdock fellow

used to cut up pretty lively with him. They were only with us about a week before we got into the mix-up. Very first day that other fellow — Wilson, did you say his name was? — got his. Murdock took it pretty hard, and then that same night he went out with a patrol, and the whole bunch were reported missing. Just after that the Boches got through to us and cut us up somethin' awful — gee! — ”

He broke off, thinking of the horrors of that desperate week. “And Murdock, what became of him?” I prompted mildly.

“Oh, we never saw him again till after the armistice. Then he came back from prison, looking as though he’d been to hell (excuse me, Miss), and he’s been with us ever since.”

“But why do you say he’s queer?” I persisted.

“I dunno exactly,” he answered slowly. “He hardly ever talks and has n’t made any pals, and he’s fierce absent-minded.

Always seems to have something on his mind and goes off by himself moonin' when he 's off duty, 'stead of getting into a little game or taking a swim like the rest of us. He 's a rum one, all right."

We talked a little longer, but I could n't learn anything more in explanation of Murdock's queerness, so I said good night and hurried home. I had promised never to stay out after dark with the canoe, and besides I was anxious to tell Father about Billy.

However, the Hunters had come over to play bridge, and I did n't have a chance to talk to Daddy. I puzzled over it myself while I was undressing. I did n't even have Martha to confide in, for she had begged to stay down-stairs just a little longer after I had come up. She adored Mrs. Hunter and tried to imitate everything about her, from her Southern accent to the way she did her hair.

Hunting in my top bureau drawer for a

handkerchief, I happened to catch the end of a piece of blue ribbon. (Mother always said that neat bureau drawers were the sign of a perfect lady, so I knew I would never be even an imperfect one.) On the end of the ribbon was a key.

“Well, Jane Graves,” I demanded of my image in the glass, “how ever did you forget about the secret passage? I’m going to hunt for it right away.”

I slipped the ribbon around my neck and fell asleep, planning ways to get into the fortress.

CHAPTER VIII

I GO EXPLORING

NEXT morning Jimmy was leaving the breakfast table just as I came down.

“Ecthcuth me, pleath,” he said most politely. “I have to do my thpelling.”

“Certainly, son,” Father replied, adding when Jimmy was out of earshot, “I wish some one would tell me what has come over that child.”

“It *is* queer,” Mother agreed, wrinkling her forehead the way she does when she’s perplexed.

“Is Jimmy getting queer, too?” I asked, reaching for a muffin.

“She admits it at last,” grinned Martha,

deliberately moving the dish of preserves to her side of the table.

I decided to ignore her. "You remember Billy Murdock, don't you, Daddy?" I continued. "A jolly, red-haired boy who used to be in Company D."

"By Jove — (Father had gotten very English since he went to France) — By Jove, then I was n't mistaken. I thought I recognized him at drill several times, but I could never find him afterward."

So I told him what had happened last night and what the other men said about Billy.

"It does seem queer and very unlike the boy as I remember him," he agreed. "But he 's probably just got a grouch, or is in love, or something of the sort. I 'll try to have a talk with him, though."

"Please do, Father," I begged. "I can't imagine what has made him change so. But what 's queer about Jimmy?"

Mother and Dad looked at each other, tried hard not to smile and then laughed shamelessly.

"He 's a perfect imp, and we ought n't to laugh at him," Dad chuckled, "but I 'll never forget the expression on Mr. Kenyon's face when those pigs came down the aisle."

"What pigs? What aisle?" I demanded.

"Well," Father drawled tantalizingly, "our good friend, the Reverend Mr. Kenyon, was holding his regular weekday service in the mess hall last evening and discoursing, quite impressively, on the text, 'Cast not your pearls before swine.' Right in the middle of a particularly eloquent bit, the men began to grin and nudge each other. The Reverend Kenyon had his back to the door and did n't notice anything unusual until the men started to snicker. He saw them all looking toward the doorway and turned around angrily, to find three very fat and very pink little

pigs staring at him with mildly inquiring expression, as though demanding the whereabouts of the forbidden pearls."

"Go on," I giggled.

"That was all — and quite enough. The meeting broke up in confusion, the pigs proved to be the ones the Hunters are raising in that lot below the tennis court, and Jimmy 'fessed up as to how they got there. He 'd been sent on an errand to the chaplain's study yesterday afternoon and had happened to notice the text he was writing about."

"Ye gods," I exclaimed in admiration, "what will that ki — boy do next! But I 'd hardly call it unusual."

"Oh, that 's not the queer part," Mother explained. "You know how he used to hate being sent to bed for a punishment?"

"And would beg to be spanked instead? Of course I do."

"Well, he does n't seem to object to it at all since we 've been down here; did n't

say a word when I ordered him to bed right after supper for a week. He was up there all evening, and yet he has n't done his lessons."

"I'm almost sure there was n't any light in his room when I came in from canoeing," I said thoughtfully. "I wonder — oh, I bet anything I know! Wait a minute, and I'll find out."

I jumped up from the table and tore upstairs. Jimmy was sitting at his desk, with his spelling book open in front of him.

"That was some stunt you pulled off with the pigs," I remarked casually, throwing myself down on his bed. "How did you ever think of it?"

"Eathy ath pie," he replied nonchalantly, though I could tell he was as pleased as Punch by my admiration. "Betty Ellen helped me get 'em there. Don't you let on about that, though. Gee, Thith, you ought to 've theen old Kenyon'th

fathe!" Jimmy laughed happily at the memory.

"You got yours for it all right, though, did n't you?" I asked sympathetically. "A whole week in your room; that's tough. Maybe I can get Dad to give you a licking instead."

"You'd better not," said Jimmy; "might get in wrong yourself. I don't mind it much."

I was lying with my head at the foot of the bed, by this time. There was a big window just to the left of the headboard, and I had a perfect view of the broad, green court between our house and the barracks. Some of the chairs had been left out from last night's entertainment.

"All right, if you don't mind," I said, getting up and sauntering out of the room. "Better hurry up, it's after eight."

I found the rest of the family on the porch. "Jimmy sends his love," I announced, "and asks me to tell you that he

forgives you for the cruel punishment you are inflicting upon him. It is n't half bad to be sent to bed when you can lie there and watch moving pictures every night!"

It took over two weeks for Timmons to finish my double paddle and for me to learn to use it.

Then came the Fourth of July and a big celebration at the Post. At least half the town turned out to watch the troops maneuver on the parade ground and cheer the winner in a championship baseball game. In the evening we had fireworks and Japanese lanterns, and the cooks had made a huge pile of sandwiches and a regular well of lemonade, that disappeared in double-quick time. It was a sizzling hot day, but such a jolly one that even our English friends confessed that they were extremely glad we had an Independence Day to celebrate.

We were busy at school, too, with basketball games and end-of-the-term quizzes

and a French play Nicolette was coaching, so that I did n't have many spare minutes. When I *did* get out in the *Sweetheart*, Timmons or Jimmy or Madelon or Martha would be with me, or else there would be people on the grass plot around the fortress or rowing near the bank, so that there was no chance of visiting it undisturbed.

However, one evening just after supper, I managed to get away without any one seeing me and slipped down with the current into the shadow of the fortress walls. There was no one in sight, and I hurriedly fastened the canoe and scrambled out on to the bank. The strip of grass was little wider than a path and, keeping close to the walls, I could move along without being seen from either the town or the barracks.

Under the central part of the fortress was the saluting battery, which I knew would be fired again at eight o'clock. That left only two walls that could possibly

contain an opening of any kind, and I hurriedly inspected their stony red surfaces. There seemed to be plenty of cracks in them, and I eagerly pushed against one hard surface after another. Suddenly, at the bottom of the wall nearest the town, a stone moved ever so slightly under my fingers. I pushed it back slowly, for it was heavy, and, kneeling down, looked into an irregularly shaped opening about three feet high and two wide. It was pitch dark, as far as I could see, and I hesitated a while before I crawled gingerly in.

Once inside I found I could stand upright, and as my eyes grew a little accustomed to the darkness, I could make out the walls of a small room. I felt around, bumping against a chair and a table, and finally discovered on a little shelf the light I was sure must be somewhere about. It proved to be a flashlight, the largest and most powerful I had ever seen, and with its bright rays I explored every corner of the room.

It was narrow and fairly long. There was a thick rug on the stone floor, a shelf along one side that held a pile of books and several magazines — and, of course, the table and chair my shins had already discovered.

“What a peachy hiding place!” I said out loud. “I’m glad I’m the only one who knows about it.”

I knew the men would be coming down soon to fire the battery, so I only stopped to make sure that my key fitted the inner door and to take one look into the gloomy cellar of the fortress, before closing up the passage and starting home in the *Sweetheart*.

“I’ll be back soon,” I promised, as I looked back and tried to recognize the cracks that marked the opening. “It’s the wall beyond the battery. Joshua, but it does seem queer to find everything just the way Lieutenant Duncan described it that night at Norfolk!”

CHAPTER IX

LAZY DAYS

SCHOOL closed the thirtieth of July, and the very next day it began to rain. Jimmy was disgusted. "What ith the uth of havin' a vacation, if it rainth all the time," he wanted to know, after we had been shut up in the house for three days and had read all the books and painted all the pictures and played all the games Mother could suggest.

"I 'm sick of staying in, too," I admitted, getting up from the floor, where we had been carrying on a world war with tin soldiers and Father's old maps of the front. "Let 's see if Mother will let us go out."

After we had argued a little about how

hot it was and how good rain water was for the complexion and so forth, she gave us permission, and we dressed up in our oldest clothes and raincoats and rubbers and started out into a very wet and slippery world. Martha was going over to Mrs. Hunter's to learn how to make a smock, and we teased her about her big umbrella and pretended we were going to splash her, until she began to run. Of course she ran right into a great big puddle and got as furious with us as if we had put the puddle there on purpose.

"I'm going to tell Mother this minute," she shrieked, splashing muddy water all over herself; but we had decided that it was about time for us to be elsewhere and were tearing down through the garden as fast as we could go. We climbed along the breakwater and went out on the wharf. The tide was so high that when we teetered up and down on the boards, the water leaked through the cracks.

"Letth climb up on the boathouthe roof," Jimmy suggested.

We chose the smallest house, and by stepping on Jimmy's locked hands, I managed to scramble on to the roof, although it was very slanty. Then I held on with one hand and helped Jimmy up with the other. As soon as we were comfortably settled, it began to pour bucketsful, but we were so close to the water that it seemed almost like being on a boat, and it was such fun we hated to leave.

"Letth pretend we 're being wathed away in a flood that made uth get out of our houthe on to the roof," Jimmy proposed.

"Yes; and the children are in the third story," I added. "We forgot all about them in the excitement."

"But we would n't, Jane."

"Well, then, the door got jammed, and we could n't get to them. But I don't believe they 're drowned yet, and per-

haps you can get them out through the window."

Jimmy went to the rescue of the perishing children, lying on his stomach and hanging down to look into the window, while I held his feet. And right then and there I nearly killed my one and only brother, for I happened to look toward the wharf, and a marine was running toward the deep-water end as though he were going to jump right off.

I was so startled that I half let go of Jimmy's feet, and he howled wildly as he started to slip. The man stopped quickly at the sound and, turning around, began to run in our direction. But before he reached us, Jimmy had managed to scramble back to my side and was calling me all sorts of names for trying to murder him.

"What are you kids doing up there?" demanded the stranger.

My hair was plastered down by the rain

and sticking into my eyes, but I finally shook it out and looked down, — to discover Billy Murdock standing below, looking cross and very wet.

“We’re jutht playing,” Jimmy told him meekly.

“Well, you’d better come down before you kill yourselves. Here — slide and I’ll catch you.”

He helped us both to the ground and then, before I could even thank him, turned on his heel and walked rapidly away.

“He *is* queer,” I exclaimed. “Come on, Jimmy, let’s run.”

We raced back to the house, and Mother helped us put on dry clothes, and told us that Mrs. Hunter was having a candy pull and we were to go right over.

We did n’t have to be invited twice, and when we had broken the record for getting to Hunters’, we found them all in the kitchen, with big aprons tied around

their necks, taking turns at stirring a pan of molasses that was bubbling away on the stove and sending forth a most delicious smell.

“Heah come the wateh babies!” cried Mrs. Hunter.

“I suah hope you all got enough wateh to last a while,” added Martha, and we were so glad to find her peaceably inclined that, for once, we did n’t pay any attention to her would-be Southern accent.

The candy was soon ready to pull, and all of us, from the Captain down to Betty Ellen, who pranced around in the pinkest and frillest of aprons, getting in everybody’s way, pulled and pulled and pulled, until we were sticky from head to foot, and had laughed ourselves weak and eaten enormous quantities of taffy. We put what was left on a platter to cool, and Mrs. Hunter took us upstairs to wash off a little of the stickiness.

“What a pehfectly dahling powdeh

box —” Martha was gushing, when there suddenly came wild yells from downstairs and the crash of broken china, and Betty Ellen, shrieking for her mother, started up the steps.

We all ran to the head of the stairs. “What is the matteh, deah?” Mrs. Hunter inquired anxiously, holding out her arms to catch the youngster, as she tripped over her long apron and wept more loudly than ever.

“It’s Jimmy, it’s Jimmy, Mother,” she sobbed. “He’s killing Donny —”

Martha and I raced down to the kitchen. The platter, broken into a dozen pieces, was lying on the floor, together with bits of sticky taffy and two squirming boys. Jimmy was on top of Don, and judging from the latter’s shrieks, was slowly and painfully murdering him.

“James Graves!” Martha cried, grabbing his shoulder and trying to pry him loose. “Stop it this instant. Stop hitting poor little Donny.”

She finally got him away and shook him hard. I did n't blame her a bit, for it certainly seemed to be a plain case of assault and battery, and against his host at that. Still I knew that Jimmy would have something to say for himself.

Mrs. Hunter, with Betty Ellen clinging to her skirts, was in the kitchen by this time, and so was Captain Hunter, who had turned back on his way to the barracks, at the sound of the rumpus. Donny had stopped crying, and was sitting up and glaring ferociously at Jimmy, who had his hands in his pockets and seemed as cool as a cucumber, although Martha still held his collar and would shake him every now and then, sort of absent-mindedly.

“Well, well, what 's all this ?” asked the Captain, looking straight at Jimmy.

“We were fighting, thir,” stated Jimmy, not at all embarrassed.

“So I see. But what about ?”

“I 'd rather not thay, thir.”

Captain Hunter looked surprised and turned to his own son. "Donny, what were you fighting about?"

Donny kicked the table leg but made no reply.

"Donald, what were you fighting about?"

There was no defying that tone, and it all came out in one breath. "Motheh told us not to take any moah candy aftah she put it on the platteh till she said we could, and I was taking some, and Jimmy saw me and said I must n't, and I said I did n't have to mind him, he hit me and then we fought."

"That was no reason for fighting, Jimmy. Just wait till I tell Father. Why did you hit him?" Martha shook the culprit at the end of each sentence.

"I — I 'll tell Father mythelf," he gulped. "Donny wath dithobeying orderth; he wath. I 'm a marine, and I have to do what our motto tellth uth

to, don't I, thir?" he appealed to Captain Hunter.

"Which motto?" questioned the Captain.

Jimmy's eyelid quivered. He was either winking, or trying to keep from crying—and Jimmy never cried. Then he said very innocently: "Our war thlogan, I mean, thir. Firtht to fight, thir!"

"Run along to your father, boy," ordered the Captain, making an unsuccessful attempt to turn a chuckle into a cough. "And tell him you 've been illustrating the Tank Corps motto¹ as well as our own."

After a week of steady rain, it cleared for a day, and for the rest of our vacation the sun shone over half the time. Every morning we played tennis or went for a paddle; and in the afternoon we either went over to Mosquito Bay for a swim or watched the men play baseball. Evenings there were movies or vaudeville shows and

¹ The Tank Corps motto was "Treat 'em rough."

more paddling, especially when Timmons and I took Father for long trips up the bay while the moon was full.

Martha went to the informal dances the officers gave every Friday evening in the court and spent long afternoons sewing and talking with Mrs. Hunter. Usually when she went in next door, I would saunter down to the fortress, watch my chance to slip unobserved into the secret room and, curled up on a pile of cushions, spend happy hours sailing up the coast of Scotland with David Balfour or stubbornly holding back a heavier team in the shadow of my own goal posts by the side of my beloved Dink Stover. It was always cool in there, and I blessed Lieutenant Duncan a thousand times for telling me about his secret.

Madelon and Thérèse came down to spend a week with us, and we had the jolliest time, — picnics and swimming parties and boat rides every day. Mrs.

Hunter gave a little tea for Martha and Thérèse and some of the younger officers. She asked us beforehand if we would like to come, and I was scared to death Madelon would say yes, but she did n't. She was very polite about refusing, though, and Mrs. Hunter told Mother afterward that she had never known a girl of her age with such charming manners.

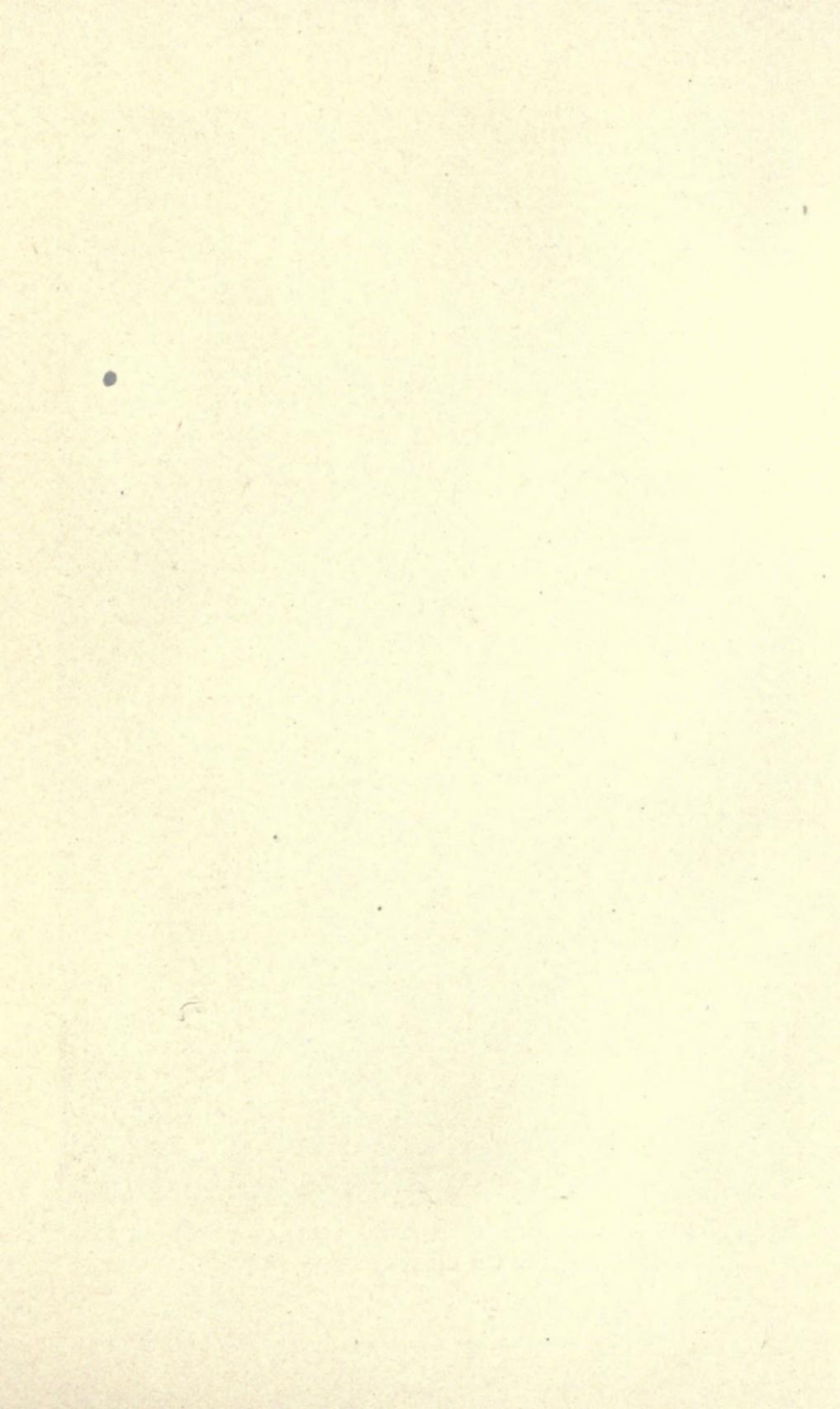
“Sapristi!” Madelon whispered to me after her talk with Mrs. Hunter. “If I had had to go to her old tea, I should have died in a feet! Let's get Mr. Timmons and go out in the canoe.”

The night the Clerets left, after making us promise to come to the plantation for a week in October, I came upstairs just before dinner and noticed Martha's door standing open. I stuck my head into her room, intending to repeat some barracks' gossip Timmons had told me, but kept it there for an entirely different purpose.

Martha was sitting in front of her dress-



She studied her reflection in the mirror, smiled, rolled her eyes and changed to the other elbow. — *Page 137.*



ing table, with her back to me and entirely unconscious of my presence. She had her hair done a new way, with puffs over her ears, and was leaning an elbow on the table and resting her chin gracefully on her hand. She studied her reflection in the mirror, smiled, rolled her eyes and changed to the other elbow.

“Oh, Lieutenant Pohtah, you don’t cayeh if I give away youah othah dance, do you?” I heard her murmur, pouting her lips and looking sideways out of her eyes.

I stared at her stupidly, hardly able to believe my own ears. Then she rested her chin on both hands and lowered her eyelashes demurely. “I wondah if you would get my cape from the house (No, that has n’t enough ‘r’s’ in it,” she interrupted herself). “I wondah,” she began again, after a minute’s thought, “I wondah if I might bothah you to ask Mothah foh my scyahf, then we could wandah in the gyahden —”

“Stick to one part of the South while you’re about it,” I interrupted, coming out of my trance. “Don’t mix Virginia and Tennessee and Georgia all in one sentence.”

Martha jumped as though she had been shot, at the sound of my voice, and blushed crimson. “How long have you been there, Jane Graves?” she demanded. “What do you mean by eavesdropping and spying and —”

“Your door was wide open, and I happened to be passing,” I replied with great dignity. “I am exceedingly sorry that I overheard you, for, although I’ve always suspected you of being a fool, I never imagined anything as bad as this!”

“As bad as what? Just wait till I tell Mother what a sneak you are. I’ll —”

“Go ahead; and I’ll tell her how you sit and make eyes at yourself in the mirror and practice idiotic speeches. How will you like that? Of all simple, conceited,

smirking, pie-faced copycats, you take the prize!" I stalked into my own room and banged the door.

Martha followed me, as I knew she would, and begged me not to tell. I was disgusted, though, and I knew how to drive Martha almost frantic.

"Please, Jane," she pleaded. "I know it was silly, and I never did it befoah."

"Befoah?" I echoed softly.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't start that. I'll go crazy."

"Crazy?" I repeated, still more quietly.

"Honestly, Jane, can't you listen to me a minute?"

"Minute?"

"Oh, stop it! I'll never speak to you again, if you tell any one. Thérèse put it into my head, and I was only doing it for fun."

"Fun?"

At that point Martha burst into tears and slapped me in the face. I slapped her

back; and then we both felt a lot better, although we would n't admit it. The dinner gong rang before we could start the argument again, and we hurried to wash our faces and get down on time.

Of course, I did n't tell any one about Martha's private theatricals, but for months I could make her do anything in the world for me by simply whispering, "then we can wandah in the gyahden."

CHAPTER X

AT "LA PATRIE"

ONE Saturday near the end of October, Madelon and Thérèse and their big brother Pierre came down for us in the old motor-truck that M. Cleret had bought from the Post to convey his numerous sons and daughters to and from the Convent School.

Pierre was a tall, jolly boy of nineteen, with tumbled brown hair and a skin tanned by work on the plantation until it was as dark as a native's. He drove the rattly, worn-out truck with one hand, keeping up a steady stream of foolish remarks, and bumped us from side to side on the hilly road until our teeth chattered.

“Here we are,” he announced, as we topped a last hill and turned with a jerk into a narrow driveway.

We jumped out hastily and thankfully, and, laden with suitcases and packages of groceries that the girls had bought in town, followed Thérèse up the flagged path to the big, rambling white farmhouse. It was a wonderfully homelike and friendly house; vines almost completely covered its white walls and even stuck inquiring tendrils over the edge of the scarlet roof; around the doorway was a trellis of climbing white roses; crisp curtains fluttered at every window, and from between one pair of them at least floated out a delicious odor of freshly baked bread.

“*Où est Maman?*” called Thérèse, and in a minute we were surrounded by a swarm of little Clerets, who came dashing out of the door and around the corners of the house and threw themselves upon us with shouts of delight.

"*Eh, bien, Ma'amselles,*" plump, jolly Madame Cleret beamed at us from the doorway. "*Eet ees fine that you have come. Nous sommes heureux de vous voir, Monsieur Cleret et moi.* Come een; come een."

The children took our packages and bags and escorted us, laughing and chattering like little magpies, to a cunning bedroom on the second floor, with a sloping roof, and white furniture decorated with formal painted bouquets of pink and blue flowers.

"Madelon," Madame Cleret called up the stairs, as we were trying to unpack our bags, with a great many would-be helpers giggling and pushing and getting in each others' way, "*Madelon, dépêches-toi et dites à Gerta que vous êtes arrivées. Ne voulez-vous dîner pas?*"

We most certainly did want to dine and hurriedly washed our hands so as not to keep them waiting. "It's enough to feed a regiment," I whispered to Madelon, as

we sat down, fifteen strong, at a long white-painted table set with blue doilies and loaded down with good things to eat.

I soon discovered, though, that Madame Cleret knew more about the appetites of her happy-go-lucky family than I did, for cold meats and steaming vegetables, hot and spicy in true Creole style, salads and preserves, heaping piles of bread and rolls, crisp French cakes and cookies and huge pitchersful of milk disappeared as if by magic. And such joking and laughing and chattering accompanied their disappearance!

Every one, from tall, thin Papa Cleret, with his bald head and twinkling blue eyes, down to the curly-headed baby in her high chair, adopted us on the spot and treated us to laughing comments, sometimes in English, but just as often in French, frequent helpings of everything eatable in sight and, from the youngest members, occasional sticky hugs and kisses.

"Wait a minute," I begged, during a moment's comparative quiet, "I want to get you all straightened out."

"Shoot away," laughed a brown-haired boy opposite me. "Who am I?"

"Pierre, of course," I replied confidently, only to have them burst into perfect roars of laughter.

"So you've forgotten me already," called the real Pierre from the other end of the table. "Jacques will be so conceited from that compliment there will be no living with him."

By way of reply, Jacques, who was a year younger than his brother but looked almost exactly like him, tried to start a rough-and-tumble fight on the spot. But Madame Cleret's quiet "*Allons, mes enfants*" sent them back to their seats, and I continued my inventory.

"I know Madelon and Thérèse, of course, and Ma'amselle Nicolette and Pierre and Jacques, that makes five; Marie-

Louise, with the black curls, is six, and the twins make eight —”

“And are eight,” Madelon interrupted to tease the two tow-headed boys who were staring at me in wide-eyed curiosity.

“*Et moi! Et moi!*” piped up Jean-Christophe, upsetting the marmalade jar in his excitement. “*J'ai cinq ans.*”

“Five years old! Well, you are a big boy! What's this cherub's name?” I asked, rescuing the spoon the baby had thrown on the floor.

“*Jolie,*” they all answered at once, and I did n't wonder they called her that, for pretty she surely was, with her golden curls and pink cheeks and big dark eyes.

“I think big families are the nicest things in the world,” I sighed enviously.

“So do I,” agreed the boy who was sitting beside me. He was Winston Roberts, a friend of Pierre's and an only child.

“Sometimes they are,” said Madelon,

making a face at Jacques, who had just helped himself to her currant bun.

The longer we stayed at La Patrie, though, the more strongly we decided in favor of a large number of brothers and sisters. There was n't a dull minute.

Papa Cleret took us all around the plantation, which was almost the last one of its kind on the island, and we saw the sugar cane being cut in the fields and drawn in oxcarts to the crushing mill. He explained that he did not do his own "refining" but shipped the raw sirup to a manufacturer in Porto Rico, as that proved to be more profitable.

"We 'll never get reech ; non, *jamais*," he said whimsically. "But eet gives us enough to pay for food and for clothes, and we are verry happy — à *La Patrie*."

"Why do you call it that?" I asked.
"I 've always wondered."

"When we came way off here and left *notre chère Alsace*, *il y a bien des années*,"

he explained, "we were verry homeseeck for a while, Maman and I; so we named our plantation *La Patrie* — the Mother-land — and so eet has come to be for us."

"Yes," Madelon teased, "they even grow red flowers in blue window-boxes against the walls of the house, so that our flag is always in sight, *n'est-ce pas, mon père?*"

We played tennis almost every day and croquet, and at night we danced, while Madame Cleret played on a tinkly old-fashioned piano and Monsieur on his violin. We learned to ride the good-natured little gray donkeys that M. Cleret kept to draw his loads of sugar sirup down to the wharf, and on their sturdy backs explored the trails over the hills in every direction. Whenever the boys could leave their work, they came with us, and Winston dropped in almost daily, to see Pierre, he said, but he was seldom far from Thérèse.

On one of our trips we rode down to the Chachas settlement west of Charlotte

Amalie, to get some hats. When Thérèse proposed it, I had n't any idea whether Chachas were animals or Bolsheviks or some new kind of fruit, and I said as much. Martha looked at me pityingly, although I was sure she had never heard of them either, and it was Madelon who supplied the information.

"They 're the descendants of French refugees who fled years ago from other islands because of religious persecution," she explained. "The name is supposed to come from our word '*chercher*' — to seek. They have always lived in that one settlement and have intermarried until most of them are half-witted or at best hopelessly stupid, but they manage to live by fishing in the bay and farming patches of hill land, and they do make the nicest hats!"

"It 's funny you 've never heard of them before," began Martha.

"Yes?" I said politely. "Perhaps it was because I never wandahed in the —"

"Oh, look at those lovely blue flowers," Martha interrupted hastily, turning to Jacques. "Won't you get me some?"

"For the gyahden?" I asked wickedly.

Her only answer was to dig her heels sharply into the sides of her astonished donkey and tear ahead of us down the road, leaving a much-bewildered Jacques to jog off in pursuit.

The Chachas were uninteresting, scrawny-looking people, and there was nothing at all picturesque about their dirty village, but the hats they had for sale were so light and wide-brimmed and so beautifully woven that we each bought one and rode proudly back to La Patrie with our new headgear flopping in the breeze.

Another afternoon Christine Dann gave a tea for some of the Convent School girls, and the four of us dressed up in our starchiest organdies and rattled down to town in the motor-truck.

It was an alarmingly formal affair, call-

ing for many curtsies and much exchanging of compliments. Some of the Sisters were there, and a number of Mrs. Dann's friends; so we chatted politely about the weather and how we were enjoying our vacation and whether we had seen the new play at the Apollo. Once in a while a little group of girls would get off together in a corner, and for a few minutes the whispering would be fast and furious.

"Don't ever tell I asked you," I heard Martha murmuring to Mary Deane, "but do you know how to tell whether you're in love or not?"

"Yes, indeed, Mrs. Larkin," I replied sweetly, as that portly lady stopped to shake my hand, "we all think St. Thomas is delightful."

"— not nearly so attractive as Pierre," I caught the tail-end of Mary Deane's reply, as Mrs. Larkin moved on to her next victim.

"Of course tastes differ," Martha

whispered haughtily. "Maybe it is a good thing. Jacques told me yesterday —"

"What about Thérèse and Winston?" interrupted Mary Deane.

"Oh, they're practically engaged. Don't ever tell I said so, though."

This was more than enough for me and, stopping only long enough to whisper "gyahden" in Martha's ear, I hurried across the room to Madelon, who was beckoning me. "Eats," she announced under her breath, as a neat colored maid appeared in the doorway with a two-story tray.

"They've forgotten the other slice," I whispered in horror, as the tray approached us, for it was piled high with near-sandwiches, single pieces of bread spread with all sorts of things, pressed meats, tomatoes, pickles and even tiny sausages.

"Sh!" Madelon admonished me. "Have n't you ever been to a Danish tea before?"

"No; but I like Danish sandwiches," I answered a minute later, biting into a crunchy pickle.

"Just wait till you taste some of their fruit ices and fancy cakes," she advised, and I soon discovered why, for I never ate anything so delicious in my life as the apricot ice and the chocolate and nut pastries that the double-decker tray brought in on its next trip. If Pierre had n't appeared with the truck when he did, I would have eternally disgraced myself, and as it was I accounted for three ices and at least a dozen cakes before I left and was quite truthful when I assured Mrs. Dann that I had had a delightful time.

The last evening of our visit at La Patrie we went for a hayride, — only instead of a hayrack we had a motor-truck, and instead of hay, sugar-cane stalks covered with army blankets. We rode over to the woods north of Bluebeard's Castle, parked the truck in a clearing and piled out, babies, baggage

and all. The boys built a fire and, after we had cooked bacon over it on long, forked sticks, they put potatoes in the ashes to roast.

When we had eaten a delicious picnic supper and explored the woods to our hearts' content, we started the fire again and sat in a circle around it while Papa Cleret told us stories of Alsace and of his early days in St. Thomas, until the baby and Jean-Christophe fell sound asleep, and Maman said we had better start for home.

"I 've had such a good time, Madelon," I whispered, as we sat squeezed in beside Pierre on the front seat of the truck. "I just love La Patrie and all your family, and I 'm so glad you asked me to visit you."

"Eet 's been fun great having you, Jane Graves," she declared, hugging me tighter. "You must come soon again."

"Indeed she must," seconded Pierre. "*Tu l'aimes beaucoup, n'est-ce pas, petite sœur?*"

"*Ça va sans dire; est-ce que tu ne l'aimes pas aussi?*"

I did n't understand them, but I was too sleepy to care; and I thought happily that school would soon begin again, and then I would see Madelon every day.

CHAPTER XI

A ST. THOMAS CHRISTMAS

“**B**UT we must have a Christmas tree.” Jimmy had been rapidly acquiring front teeth and almost as rapidly losing his lisp during the weeks that had flown by since we started back to school the first of November. “We could n’t have a Christmas without one.”

We were holding a family council in front of the fireplace in the living room, which boasted a roaring fire, almost the first we had had.

“Where shall we ever get one?” Martha asked practically, looking up from the fluffy white sweater she was knitting for Betty Ellen. “There are n’t any fir trees on the island, are there, Daddy?”

Father took a long puff at his cigarette, laid down his magazine and gave the matter due consideration.

“The cypresses up in the hills are probably the only evergreens we have, and they’re a bit unwieldy. But why not use one of those baby oak trees we’re experimenting with along the driveway? The Major told me only yesterday that they were getting so big he would have to take out a few.”

“Fine,” Jimmy agreed enthusiastically. “Let’s go get one right away.”

So Daddy and I went with him, and Timmons helped us dig up a thick, evenly-rounded little tree, whose topmost leaf came just even with my forehead. Jimmy and I carried it to the garden and then trotted over to the barracks for an old wooden washtub we had seen hanging in the outhouse.

“There, now, she ought n’t to die for some time,” said Timmons, as he packed

down the last spadeful of earth around the roots of the tree and sent Jimmy running for a watering pot.

“Where shall we put it, Daddy?” I asked.

“I think the porch will be the best place. The men will want to see it, I know, and that will give us plenty of room.”

The two men moved the tree, tub and all, into the most sheltered corner of the porch and then went off to town in the car,—Father to inspect the patrol and Timmons to meet the boat and get the mail. I saw Jimmy run out the back door and join them, and I almost decided to go too, for the steamer from New York only came twice a month, but it was only two days till Christmas, and I still had a lot to do on the pink silk kimono I was making, under Mother’s direction, for Martha.

“Mother!” I called, finding the living room empty. “Where are you?”

“In the storeroom,” came the muffled

reply, and I ran upstairs to find her leaning over an open trunk and scattering Christmas-tree decorations and red and white stockings and odds and ends of ribbon and bright-colored paper all over the room.

Martha was sorting things out as well as she could and had a string of imitation holly wreaths over her arm and a roll of dark green crêpe paper in her hands.

“Just what I want,” I cried, grabbing the paper and picking up a long piece of scarlet ribbon from the floor.

Martha demanded them back, of course, and came running downstairs after me. But when she saw the tree, she forgot all about wanting the paper for herself and helped me wrap it around the tub and tie it in place with the red ribbon.

“Does n’t it look great?” she cried, stepping back to inspect her handiwork. “I think it’s lots prettier than a regular tree.”

“So do I. I can’t wait to see how it

will look all trimmed. Let's get the things right away."

So we went up and helped Mother finish unpacking her almost endless stores of Christmas things and then carried the tree trimmings down to the porch and went to work. I was just fastening the last big red ball to the highest branch, when we heard the automobile stop in back of the house and then Jimmy's voice.

"Hi there, girlth," he called, lisping because he was so excited. "Come help uth. Hurry up! We've got thome load!"

I beat Martha down the path by half a second and found Dad and Jimmy almost buried under packages and boxes of every possible size and shape. Timmons had just gotten out and was lifting a huge wooden crate from the seat beside him.

"Santa Claus has discovered St. Thomas at last," Father chuckled, piling my arms full of packages and turning to give Martha her share.

"Hecuba!" I exclaimed (I had begun Spanish in school and realized its advantages already). "Did these all come on the boat?"

"They most certainly did; and you 'll find that they 're marked, 'No admittance' till day after to-morrow."

Some of them, though, we did open, for we had all commissioned Uncle Jim to buy things for us in New York. It was most exciting, because we would open presents meant for ourselves and have them hastily grabbed out of our hands; and once Martha shouted, "Oh, Jane, here 's Mother's hand —." She stopped there, though, and Mother either did n't hear her or pretended not to have noticed anything.

There were dozens of mysterious bundles from our friends and relatives back in the States, and after we had wrapped and labeled each others' presents, we carried them all upstairs and added them to the

pile already hidden in the "Christmas closet" in Mother's room, to which she alone had the key.

The big wooden crate that Timmons had carried in was still standing on the porch, and Father, with a chisel and hammer, had just pried off the wooden top.

"Oh!" shrieked Martha, lifting one corner of the excelsior pad.

"Oh! Oh!" echoed Jimmy, lifting another.

Then I jerked off the pad entirely, and we all started exploring. There were fat five-pound boxes of our favorite candy, bags of pink and white popcorn, piles of striped peppermint canes and baskets and shiny candy animals; there were fruit-cakes and puddings and ginger cookies, raisins and nuts, and in the very bottom a big box of candied fruits.

"Daddy, you angel!" we cried, all falling on him at once.

"You do think of the nicest things,

Father," I complimented. "It will be just like Christmas at home."

"That's what I'm hoping," he smiled, trying to free himself from our three pairs of arms. "Maybe it will be even nicer than the original."

Christmas morning dawned clear and warm. The sea had never looked so blue and sparkling, nor the field so freshly green, as they did on our way into town to attend the early service at All Saints Church. Charlotte Amalie itself, with its many-colored houses, against the green of the hills, might have been a giant's Christmas tree.

The little church was well filled, and the service in the cool half-darkness before the candle-lit altar was beautiful. While it lasted, I felt as though I were back in the chapel at Norfolk, and it was like waking from a dream to come out into the bright, hot sunlight and hear the holiday greetings of our St. Thomas friends.

When we got back to the house, our stockings, full to bursting, were dangling temptingly before the fireplace. Jimmy fell on his with a whoop of delight, and we weren't far behind him. Then, while Mother and Daddy sat on the davenport and smiled upon us beatifically, we filled the room with tissue paper and ribbon and with shrieks of joy at each new discovery.

"A penknife! Oh, jiminy, what a beauty!"

"Oh, Mother, how did you know I wanted a new fountain pen?"

"Look, Jane, a collar and cuff set just like Mrs. Hunter's!"

"Hecuba! What a peach of a painting box!"

"Say, what 's this?"

"Silk stockings!"

"Oranges — no, they 're tennis balls."

In only too short a time we were down to the last little package in the end of each toe.

We knew that the best was always last, so we opened them slowly.

“A watch!” cried Martha, the first to get her present unwrapped.

“A watch!” repeated Jimmy, proudly hunting for the proper pocket. “Gee, a real watch!”

While I just sat staring blissfully at a darling, tiny, eight-sided silver watch on a band of black ribbon that just fitted my wrist.

“You angelic parents,” we shouted, coming to our senses and half smothering them with grateful hugs and kisses.

“You no eat a little somethings at all this morning?” inquired Sam, grinning at us from the doorway.

“You bet we do, Sam,” Jimmy replied eagerly. “Merry Christmas!”

After breakfast there were more presents, brought down from the Christmas closet in pillowcases and distributed with great ceremony by Jimmy. Only one person

was allowed to unwrap at a time, so that the rest of the family might have a chance to inspect and admire every present. Mother was delighted with her gray suède handbag and had n't guessed at all, in spite of Martha's break; and Father thought his toilet set the most gorgeous he had ever seen.

As for me, every time I 'd get a present and begin to think that there was n't anything left in the world that I could wish for, Jimmy would hand me just the one thing I had been wanting for years. Martha had knitted me a stunning yellow sweater, just the right shade to match the *Sweetheart*; and Jimmy had remembered her, too, for his present was a tiny search-light. Daddy gave me half a dozen books that I could hardly wait to read, and Mother's present was a French blue kimono just like Martha's pink one. I wondered guiltily if she knew how I had envied Martha hers all the time I was making it.

Then there were hair-ribbons and handkerchiefs and sachets by the dozen, writing paper and silk stockings, a desk set and a new tennis racket from friends at home and in St. Thomas.

“There never was any one so lucky,” I sighed happily, when the last pillowcase had been emptied.

“Oh, yes, there was,” contradicted Martha, dancing around the room with an apricot-colored evening dress over her smock, a mandolin in one hand and a bunch of flowers in the other.

“Huh! Who wants old flowers and clothes,” shouted Jimmy contemptuously from the porch, where he was trying to roller-skate and play a single-handed game of baseball at the same time.

Timmons had been invited to dinner, which, according to Jimmy, was “some feed.” He loudly expressed his thanks for the pipe I had had sent down from New York for him. Daddy had suggested

it, and I was so glad that he had, for Timmons seemed more pleased with it than with any of the handkerchiefs and socks and candy the rest of them showered upon him.

All of the officers and most of the men dropped in during the afternoon. They admired the tree and ate the candy canes and popcorn and told jokes and funny stories, or else grew reminiscent about their homes and explained that they had n't had this kind of a Christmas since they were "kids."

In the evening the men gave a play, which was a take-off, written by two of the lieutenants, on the usual sob-stuff Christmas story, all about a poor, fragile, young coal carrier who was overcome by the heat on Christmas Eve on a doorstep in Charlotte Amalie. It was full of local hits and personalities, and it was hard to tell who enjoyed it more, the actors or the audience. There were mock presents to

the officers, too, and candy and cigarettes "all round" and a great amount of cheering and singing to end up with.

Last of all we piled the car full and drove into Charlotte Amalie to hear the Christmas carols. Bands of singers went around from house to house, playing on guitars and mandolins and a queer, harsh-sounding instrument that Lieutenant Porter told us was called a scratchy-scratch and made from a calabash. Some of the carols were ones we had known always, and it seemed so strange to hear them rising, to such weird accompaniments, in the streets of the Sweetheart of the West Indies.

About midnight all the singers joined forces in Emancipation Park and, as we drove slowly home in the moonlight, their voices came to us softened by distance.

"How about it, Jinks?" Daddy whispered, putting his arm around me. "Was it almost as good as home?"

"Better," I whispered back.

But Jimmy heard us and sleepily raised his head from Mother's knee. "Whadda ye mean, better 'n home," he murmured drowsily. "Thith ith home, thilly!"

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW YEAR'S FÊTE

SINCE almost our first day in St. Thomas we had been hearing about the New Year's celebration. "That's the big day here, rather than Christmas," the girls at school had explained. "Everybody wears fancy costumes and masks, and at daybreak a big crowd goes and sings under the mayor's balcony until he comes out and makes a speech and has his servants give them things to eat. Of course, those are only the poorer people, but in the evening almost everybody goes out on the streets, and those who don't, hold open house for the mummers."

A whole crowd of us planned to go in

from the barracks early in the evening, and later Martha and I were going to a dinner party at Mary Deane's.

Major Edwards asked me to be his "partner", and I decided that we would have original costumes, if I could do anything about it. "Anybody can be a gipsy or a clown," I explained to him. "But we can think of something better, I know."

"What's this?" he asked in pretended astonishment. "Me dress up — an old man like me?"

"I would hardly call *you* old, sir," I protested diplomatically. "Of course you're going to wear a costume; you can't go if you don't."

"Well, well," he chuckled, "if you say so, I suppose I have to do it. Let me know what it's to be."

I puzzled my brains for two days and finally told the Major that he might wear his uniform, if he would put on a false mustache and carry a cane. "You see —"

I explained, and he was delighted with my scheme.

When New Year's evening came, Mother was n't feeling well and Father did n't want to go without her, so Captain and Mrs. Hunter promised to chaperon us, turning themselves into a wicked-looking pair of gipsies as an aid to performing their duties. Betty Ellen and Donny made a cunning Pierrette and Pierrot, and Jimmy, a red-nosed clown, never left them for long. Martha had on a Colonial costume that had been in the family for generations, and she numbered among her cavaliers an Indian warrior, a Bolshevik and a ballet dancer with pink maline skirts and a deep bass voice.

They had all assembled in the living room, and I could hear the rumble of their voices and every now and then Martha's silvery giggle. "Jane," she called at last, "ahn't you evah coming? We 've been waiting pehfect ages."

“On my way,” I replied, tripping gracefully down the stairs.

I had the satisfaction of seeing Martha’s mouth fly open and her face turn scarlet, and then —

“Bless my soul, can this be Jane?” gasped the Major.

“Right you ahe, old thing,” I cooed. “As soon as I get my scyahf from Mothah, we can staht.”

They all stood and stared at me; and it was n’t much wonder. I had found an old black evening dress of Mother’s in the storeroom and cut out a breadth to make it good and tight; my hair, which I had been coaxing to grow since I came to St. Thomas, was rolled under and stuck out on the sides in huge puffs; I could n’t find any rouge, but I had painted a beautiful hectic flush on each cheek with my pink water-color paint and had powdered my nose until it looked like a marshmallow; I wore an artificial red rose at my waist and another

in the "vampish" black chiffon hat which had once belonged to Ma'amselle Nicolette; the scarf, which I needed mostly for conversational purposes, was a spangly one and very long.

"Don't you all admire my carnival costume?" I drawled.

"Jane Graves, you can't go to town and to Mary Deane's in that disgusting-looking dress," stormed Martha.

"No?" I inquired politely. "Then I'll have to wande in the gyahden."

I thought that would have a quieting effect, and it did. She turned on her heel without another word and stalked down the path, her bodyguard straggling after her.

When we reached Charlotte Amalie, we found the streets crowded with maskers and ankle-deep in confetti. All sorts of instruments were being played, and we stopped on Main Street to watch the dancers. I never saw such wiggling and

squirming in my life; they seemed to move every muscle in their bodies, swaying from side to side and backwards and forwards in time to the hideous screechings of the scratchy-scratch. Their costumes seemed to be in layers, each of a different though equally brilliant color.

“Sort of contagious, isn’t it?” laughed Lieutenant Porter, twirling around on his toes until his pink ballet skirts stood out straight around him. “Some class to the native ‘shimmie,’ don’t you think, Miss Jane-the-Vampire?”

“Oh, Lieutenant,” I giggled coyly, making sure that Martha was listening. “Naughty, naughty, mahshmallow *whip!*”

“Come on; don’t let’s stand here all night,” commanded an extremely haughty Colonial dame, and we moved up the street in search of more excitement.

I knew I had Martha’s “Angora” safe in my keeping, for one night at least, but before I had been walking for half an hour,

I would willingly have given it back and never attempted to get it again. My skirt was so tight that it made my knees ache to walk, my high-heeled slippers made me turn my ankle every other step, my hair kept falling down, and altogether I was so hot and cross and tired by the time we reached the Deanes' that the thought of sitting through a dinner party filled me with horror.

However, Mary pinned up my hair more securely, and lent me a pair of low-heeled pumps and admired my costume so warmly that I felt quite peppy again by the time we joined the other guests in the drawing room. We all wore masks and had numbers pinned on our backs, and whoever guessed the most people correctly was to be given a prize.

I recognized Pierre right away, in a Robin Hood costume of Lincoln green, and hurried over to find out his number.

“Well, Monsieur,” I murmured shyly,

“you don’t know me, I see. But I know you — ah, yes, your image is graven on my heart.”

“Oo la ! la !” he cried, in pretended terror. “Beda Thara has captured me for sure.”

I saw that he really did n’t recognize me and suggested that we go around the room together, hunting familiar voices. We talked to Thérèse and to Winston Roberts and Anna Larkin and Christine Dann, and even to Madelon ; none of them recognized me, and most of them thought Pierre was Jacques.

“Turn in your lists,” Mary called, “and ask your partners for dinner, *before* you unmask.”

“You ’ll go with me, won’t you?” said Pierre.

“Yes, indeed,” I promised. “My, these masks are hot ; let ’s take them off.”

“Jane,” he gasped. “Well, I ’ll be — hanged ! I thought you were Martha.”

“And I thought you were Pierre!” I cried, equally surprised.

“Which is a good joke on both of us,” laughed Jacques. “Come along; they’re starting into the dining room.”

The table was beautiful, with tall candles and crimson flowers, and it was the liveliest dinner party, I’m sure, in the whole town. I ate all sorts of strange dishes, that neither looked nor tasted like anything, as Jacques said, “animal, mineral *or* vegetable,” and talked tennis and swimming and the Marine Corps; and whenever I saw Martha looking in my direction, I pretended to be vamping Jacques for all I was worth.

“Boys and girls —” began Mr. Deane, suddenly rising at the other end of the table. “This party to-night has a double purpose — to celebrate the coming of the New Year and to announce an engagement.”

“W-what?” I asked Jacques. “Who?”

He smiled mysteriously but refused to

answer and, looking around the table, I saw that nearly every one seemed as surprised as I certainly was.

“Yes,” Mr. Deane continued, “this is a very proud and happy moment for me—and I greatly appreciate the honor that is mine in being asked to tell the glad news.”

“Go on, tell it,” some one begged, not meaning to be rude.

But Mr. Deane was not to be hurried. “My son, whom I believe most of you know, returned only last week from the States, where he has been working for the past year. Did he bring a bride with him? No, indeed; he wanted a wife from Charlotte Amalie, because he knew that the girls of St. Thomas are the most beautiful, the most charming and the most lovable in the world.”

The boys applauded this eulogy politely, but he went serenely ahead. “Billy thinks that he has chosen the most beautiful and charming of the lot—and he says he had

a mighty hard time getting her. Had to fairly drag her away from the doors of a convent and all that sort of thing."

"Nicolette!" some one cried.

"Yes, Nicolette," answered a merry voice, and Ma'amselle herself, prettier and more smiling than I had ever seen her, appeared in the doorway, holding tight to the coat-tails of a young giant with a crooked smile and eyes like Mary's.

"Hurrah!" we all cried, when we could get our breath. "Tell us all about it! Show us the ring! Come on in and sit down!"

If the party had been lively before, it became positively hilarious now, and it was long past midnight before we had sung the last song and drunk the last toast (in sure-enough English eggnog) to the future bride and groom. Then the Clerets took us home in the truck, and Nicolette told us confidentially how she had "thought she could live without him, but found she

could n't" and now could hardly wait to be married, although it would mean leaving her beloved St. Thomas and going back to the States with him.

"Jane," Martha asked, coming into my room, as I was braiding my hair in front of the mirror, "don't you think that's the most romantic thing? She never told him she was thinking of becoming a nun, and if he had come for her a month later, she would have taken her vows and it would have been too late."

"She'd probably have let him know in time," I yawned. "She knew she wanted to marry him."

"All the same, I think it's just like a book," Martha protested. "I hope when I—"

"Nicolette Cleret is eight years older than you, so I would n't begin worrying about romance yet," I advised sleepily. "For goodness' sake, shut up and go to bed."

CHAPTER XIII

THE INEXPLICABLE MURDOCK

“**H**OW about that picnic?” Father asked casually, one morning early in February, as he pulled up his chair to the breakfast table.

“Yes, how about it?” agreed Martha, who had no idea what he was talking about, I was sure.

“What picnic, Dad?” I asked, scorning to be such a hypocrite.

“Hunter and I have been talking of paying a visit to the Indian excavations,” he explained. “It will be an all-day trip, and I thought we might choose a Saturday and make a picnic out of it.”

“That would be great. But who’s been excavating Indians?”

“Why, Jane, have n’t you heard of the

research work the archeologists are doing at Magens Bay?"

"The what the who are doing where?"

"An expedition sent out by the Museum of the American Indian found the remains of an ancient village several feet underground, and they are still digging up pottery and relics of different kinds from mounds near the shore of Magens Bay."

"Really, Jane," Martha remarked patronizingly, "I should think you would know that, when you 've been here over eight months."

"Is that so?" I replied indignantly. "Well, I 'll bet ten dollars you 'd never heard of it yourself five minutes ago. You always wait until some one else has asked about something and then act as though you had known all about it all the time."

"Perhaps I heah of a few things that you don't, my deah."

"Oh scratchy-scratch! You make me tired!"

“Jane, Jane,” Mother cried reprovingly, “you must not use that expression; and you must n’t quarrel with your sister.”

“Why, Mother,” I defended myself, “that’s the name of a perfectly good musical instrument. I’ve told you so lots of times. Besides, I was n’t fighting with her. I would n’t bother to quarrel with her. She’s so everlastingly —”

“Come, come. Stop it, Jinks,” Father interrupted sternly. “This is n’t getting our picnic planned. I thought we would take some of the men along. I suppose you want Timmons?”

“Of course. And Billy Murdock.”

“And Lieutenant Gordon.”

“Are Betty Ellen and Donny going, Daddy?”

“Wait a minute,” Father begged. “The road is too rocky for anything but the old truck, and that only holds fourteen. The Major particularly wants to go.”

“We’re five and the Hunters make nine

and the Major ten and Timmons and Billy twelve and Martha's old lieutenant thirteen —”

“And we 'd better take Tonino to relieve Timmons with the driving. So there 's our party all fixed. We 'll leave as early as possible next Saturday morning, if it is n't too hot.”

When Saturday came there was a fresh ocean breeze and, although the ride up into the hills was so bumpy we pretended we were on a roller coaster, we kept most comfortably cool all day. When we reached La Folie, Timmons stopped the car, and we all piled out to see the view. Directly below us, in the harbor of Charlotte Amalie, we could make out ships of almost every nationality, patiently waiting their turns at the coaling wharves or the dry dock. Along both coasts tiny green islands stood out against the blue of the ocean, and the air was so clear that we could easily see the mountain tops of St. Croix.

From La Folie the road ran down steeply to the northeast, past the beautiful Louisenhoh estate, to the shore of Magens Bay. The archeologists proved to be quite ordinary-looking men, with a great fondness for talking. Probably they seldom had an audience. They showed us the mounds and explained the special method of excavation they used to prevent the breaking of the pottery and amulets and other things they found.

We invited them to share our picnic lunch and, in return, they offered us coffee and goats' milk and queer, spicy cakes. By the time the last olive had disappeared, we were beginning to wish that our elders would tear themselves away. But they had apparently settled down for an afternoon's discussion and paid no attention to our winks and sighs. So Martha and Lieutenant Gordon wandered off into the woods, the youngsters started an elaborate game of pirate around the mounds and

holes, Timmons and Antonino went on an investigating tour of the truck's insides and I was left to amuse myself as best I could.

I had been trying for the last six months to persuade Murdock to talk to me, so I was n't exactly enthusiastic over his company. Still it was better than nothing, and I was always willing to make another attempt.

"Let 's go down to the beach," I suggested. We had been sitting near together on the edge of the group surrounding the archeologists, and I knew that he had n't been listening to them any more than I had.

"All right," he consented, rather to my surprise, and in absolute silence we walked down to the narrow strip of white sand at the edge of the bay.

"Is n't it lovely?" I cried in delight, for the water ran through every shade from pale green to sapphire blue and sparkled like diamonds in the sun.

"Uh, huh," muttered Billy lifelessly and

stretched out on the warm sand with his back to the shining bay.

“What makes you sulk all the time, Billy?” I demanded, not bothering to be diplomatic or even polite, for I had tried gentler methods before. “I think you’re awfully rude; and you never used to be.”

He turned and looked at me but made no reply, except an unintelligible grunt.

“You have n’t told me a thing about your experiences in France,” I persisted. “Or about your sister? Is Barbara still at boarding school?”

He looked at me reproachfully and blurted out: “She’s all right, I guess. Don’t want to talk about it.”

“Don’t want to talk about Barbara?” I exclaimed in surprise. “Why, you never could tell me enough about her at Norfolk. You have n’t quarreled with her, have you? Don’t you remember how happy you were when she came to see you?”

He stared at me blankly. “Came to see

me?" he repeated dully. "But that was before I went to France."

"Yes, Billy, just before you sailed. She must be very proud of you now, for she surely knows how bravely you fought at Belleau Wood. I wish you would tell me all about it — and about being taken prisoner."

"Prisoner!" he cried wildly. "No! No!" And flinging himself face downward on the sand, he began to sob.

I had never seen a man cry before in my life and was horribly embarrassed. I patted him on the shoulder and tried to tell him to cheer up — and then I suddenly had an idea.

"Billy," I cried, "you've been shell-shocked, have n't you?"

But he only sobbed more loudly, and I was afraid some one would hear him.

"Brace up, old man," I begged (that being the only thing I could think of that seemed appropriate for comforting a man).

“You must n’t go on like this. You’re still upset in your — er, in your nerves, I guess.”

He was crying more quietly now and sounded so like Jimmy used to when he was smaller and fell and hurt himself, that I unconsciously began patting his head as I talked.

“I’ve read about it a lot, Billy; and about people losing their memories as a result. Is that why you’ve acted so strangely to Father and me and everybody you used to know?”

I thought he nodded his head at this and was encouraged to go on. “Can’t you remember about Barbara, either? She’s your only sister, and she just adores you — oh, I know you’d remember her if you could only see her.”

He seemed about to start crying again, but sat up instead and rubbed his forehead as though it hurt.

“Here, take my handkerchief and go

wash your face," I ordered, and he obeyed me like a three-year-old. When he came back he seemed perfectly normal again and painfully embarrassed.

"Gee, Sergeant, you 'll think me an ass and a cry-baby and worse than that," he stammered. "This thing just gets you that way. You sure were good to me."

"You poor boy," I said, feeling at least thirty years old. "You should have told some one long ago. I 'll ask Father to have the doctor see you right away."

"Oh, no, no, please," he cried, growing so white I was frightened to death. "Please, please, don't tell any one. Promise me you won't. I 'll soon be all right. If you tell any one I 'll kill myself."

Remembering that afternoon on the wharf, I half believed him, but I tried to argue anyhow.

"Why won't you let me, Billy? It 's nothing to be ashamed of, and the doctor could cure you in no time."

He would n't listen to me, though, and kept begging me not to tell and talking so wildly that I finally promised, much against my will. He seemed greatly relieved and jumped up almost cheerfully when we heard them calling to us that they were getting ready to start.

I cuddled down in the back of the truck and pretended to be sleepy, so that I would n't have to talk on the way home and could think about Billy. Why did n't he want any one to know that he had lost his memory? Perhaps that was some sort of mania resulting from the shock itself. In that case was n't it my duty to tell Daddy in spite of my promise? As if in answer to this last thought, I looked up and found Billy's eyes fixed intently on mine. It was only for a second, and then he turned back to his talk with Timmons, but I knew that I would n't break my promise. Well, it was too much for me! I yawned — and must have dozed off, for the next thing

I knew we were turning into the Barracks driveway.

I was the last one out of the truck, and Billy was standing at the side. "I was lying to you," he whispered, as he helped me jump down. "I have n't lost my memory. I never got shell-shocked. Not remember Barbara? I remember every yellow curl on her head and every freckle on her turned-up nose. I remember you and all your family just as well. I lied to you; and I 'm sorry. But you promised not to tell, and that promise still holds."

He climbed back into the truck, threw in the clutch and drove away, before I could open my mouth to question him. If I had thought him queer before, I was sure now that he was crazy.

CHAPTER XIV

I WRITE A LETTER AND MAKE A BET

I WOKE up early the next morning — early, that is, for a Sunday — and lay in bed and thought about Billy. The more I thought about him, though, the more unexplainable it all seemed. If he had n't been shell-shocked, what had been his reason for crying? If he had n't lost his memory, why did he treat his old friends so queerly and refuse to talk about his sister?

Billy Murdock was the last person in the world I would have expected to act so strangely. He had enlisted just before we went to Norfolk and was one of the first men I knew in Company D. Father had been talking to him one day after drill

when I came running up with a message, and at Daddy's "Well, Jane, what do you think of this new recruit?" Billy turned crimson. He was just eighteen then and so anxious to make good that, according to his corporal, he even begged for extra k. p.

"There are just two things I'm really crazy about," Bill had confided to me one day, after we had known each other for several months. "One of them is the marines, of course, and the other's my kid sister."

Naturally I asked about his sister and got the story of his life in reply to my question. His parents had been killed in a railroad accident when he was about six years old and his sister only a baby. They had been taken care of by a rather eccentric uncle, who had plenty of money but not much affection to give them, and they had been everything to each other. Billy's father had been a lieutenant in the marines, and the boy's dearest wish was to

follow in his footsteps. But the uncle was a pacifist and wanted him to be a minister. As soon as he was eighteen, Billy ran away and enlisted as a private in the marines, and he was perfectly happy except that he missed Barbara a great deal.

“She wanted me to do it, though,” he had explained, “and she’s proud of me. Father used to say — it’s almost the only thing I can remember about him — ‘Billy, there’s nothing finer in the whole round world than the right kind of a marine; and there’s nothing worse than a marine who fails to do his duty or is disloyal to his country. Some day, Billy, you’ll grow up, and you must never forget which kind you’re going to be — for of course you’ll be some kind of a marine.’

“That’s what my Father used to say to me over and over again when I was just a little shaver. I’ve never forgotten it, and I still think it’s a great thing for a fellow to try to live up to.”

And he had gone off, whistling, to scrub down the barrack steps.

It was hard to believe that this sullen, secretive, moody Billy could be the same boy. Timmons had even told me, greatly puzzled himself at the change, that Billy shirked his duties or did them half-heartedly.

“Hi, Sister!” Jimmy’s far from gentle voice broke in on my thoughts. “Hi, Sis! Mother says to get a wiggle on if you want any waffles.”

Nothing was going to come between me and a half-dozen hot, crisp, brown waffles if I could help it, so Murdock was hastily banished to the backmost corner of my brain. However, he was n’t destined to stay there long, for we had hardly reached our pew in the little Episcopal church we always attended before I caught sight of a familiar red head directly in front of me — and I’m afraid my mind wandered far away during the sermon.

As soon as dinner was over, I went up to my room, though I had to stick my fingers in my ears to keep from hearing Timmons' tempting "come out for a paddle" whistle. I had decided to write a letter, and nothing was going to stop me. I was almost sure Billy was n't writing to his sister, for Jack Blainey, who gave out the mail, had told me that he did n't think Billy had received a single letter since he 'd been at St. Thomas. Anyway, I meant to write to Barbara myself and find out. But as I had n't any notion what the trouble was, I tore up dozens of sheets of paper and bent the point of my fountain pen into a regular fishhook before I composed a letter that did n't say too much or make me seem to be butting in.

"Dear Barbara": I finally wrote, in despair of doing any better. "I wonder whether you remember me? When you visited your brother Billy at Norfolk, we played tennis together and I showed you around the Post. That was over two years

ago, and I suppose by now you are quite grown up and would n't think of swiping ginger cookies or sliding down the banisters the way we did then.

"We have been down here at St. Thomas ever since last May and like it lots. Father is in charge of the Post, and there are about twelve other officers and over two hundred men here. It was great to find some old friends among them, especially your brother. He seems older since he 's been to war, does n't he? His hair is as red as ever though, and he still calls me Sergeant.

"We go to a Convent School in Charlotte Amalie, and I shock the Sisters all the time by teaching them (the girls, not the teachers) to play basketball and talk slang, etc.

"Are you still at school in Peekskill? Please write to me soon and tell me all about yourself. I have never forgotten you and I hope you have n't me.

"With love,

"JANE SETON GRAVES."

I put the address at the bottom in big, black letters, so she would be sure to see it, for I thought she might want to know more about Billy right away.

After hunting for half an hour in my desk and bureau drawers for my address book, I finally found it wrapped in a red middy tie in a box in the top of the closet. (There are some advantages in being a perfect lady, though I will never admit it in public.) Then I addressed and sealed the envelope and took it over to go with the barracks' mail.

I tried to find Timmons but could n't, and my family were all too lazy to move from the porch, where they were gossiping with the Hunters, so I went down to the wharf by myself, feeling comfortably virtuous because the letter was finished and planning to reward myself with a nice long paddle. I never thought much of that proverb about virtue being its own reward, so I was n't a bit pleased when

I was informed by various members of the Sunday-afternoon loafing club that Timmons had taken the *Sweetheart* and a couple of cronies and departed in the general direction of the inlet shortly after dinner.

“Doggone the luck,” I muttered crossly, sitting down on one of the pilings and sticking my hands into the pockets of my yellow sweater. “Ever since he made that canoe, I’ve been begging him to use it himself, and he never would until just the day I wanted it most. Drat him!”

“Wal, Sergeant,” drawled Tim Thompson, a plump, bow-legged little Yankee, “I’m afraid there’s not a blooming boat left in this harbor. My own palatial yacht is laid up in the dry dock for repairs.” He pointed dramatically to a lop-sided, flat-bottomed, paintless row-boat drawn up on the beach.

“What’s the matter with her?” I asked, for she looked as solid and unsinkable as ever.

"She leaks!" Antonino chimed in, shaking his head dolefully. "The lufly and bee-yu-ti-ful Lily-uf-the-Valley has sprunged a nawful leak."

"Lily-of-the-Valley!" I cried in astonishment. "Why, I thought her name was Mudhen."

"It was, Sergeant, it was." Corporal McGraw rose to his full six feet of manly beauty the better to explain. "We used to insult her by that unkind name. We blush to think of it now, don't we, boys? (Blush, dingbust you, blush. You're a fine lot of illustrations.) But the Reverend Kenyon gave us a most inspirational talk on the beeyutifulness of everyday things, and we came to see the error of our ways. He says to us, says he, 'If you think a thing is beautiful, it becomes so.'

"'Tres been,' say we, 'we 'll think of the Mudhen as a beeyutiful yacht, all white decks and shining brasses and hundred-horse-power engines.' To help the idea

along, we baptized her over again with the more fitting appell — appalachian — of Lily-of-the-Valley. Then we went for a sail in our new yacht.”

“Well,” I laughed. “What then?”

“Why, then,” Tim took up the tale, “seeing that she was now a high-class pleasure boat, she proceeded to act as such; which is to say —”

“She sprung a leak — a nawful leak,” Antonino concluded.

Then they all three turned down the corners of their mouths and frowned at me coldly, because I could n’t stop laughing.

“That’s a great idea about ugly things looking beautiful if you think ‘em that way,” I remarked hastily, not wanting the conversation to die away just yet. “Maybe I could apply it to Sister Agatha.”

“Who’s she?” inquired McGraw, allowing a twinkle to creep into his disapproving stare.

“One of the teachers at school. She’s an

awful crank and looks as though she 's been left out all night in the rain."

"That 's a fine way to speak of your elders and betters," drawled Tim, languidly scratching a match on the sole of his shoe. "She 's no doubt an estimable woman —"

"Has a strong face, means well, and is good to her mother," interrupted McGraw. "She 's settled. Say though, Sergeant, what kind of girls do you have at this school of yours? I saw a bunch of them in town the other day, and they looked like regular doll-baby sissies."

"They 're no such thing. They 're dandy girls. I think you 're mighty rude to talk that way," I spluttered indignantly.

"Beg your pardon; beg your pardon. I did n't mean that they were n't attractive and agreeable and all that. I just thought they did n't seem much your sort — not enough pep."

"Pep! Huh! You ought to see some of our basketball games."

“I’m willing. Lead me to them.”

“I don’t believe they would let you watch us at the school. The Sisters are awfully particular and get shocked at everything.”

“Well, then, bring them over here. What’s the matter with our field? I tell you what — bring ‘em over and we’ll play ‘em. Then we’ll see who’s got the pep.”

“Oh, McGraw, we could n’t do that!”

“Scared to, are you? I might have known.”

“I’m not.”

“You are.”

“Here! Here! Wait a minute! Stop! Don’t get excited!” Tim and Antonino, up till now a silent audience, were anxious to keep the peace.

“Keep your hats on,” Tim implored, grabbing me by the skirt, for I had jumped up and started toward McGraw. “What’d you want to tease her for, you big stiff?”

She's got enough red in her hair to warn you off."

"All right," said McGraw. "I was only joking. You didn't suppose I really thought those girls would have nerve enough to do it."

"What'll you bet they have n't?" I demanded professionally, jumping up again as soon as Tim let go of my skirt. "I'll take you up for any amount."

McGraw looked surprised, mumbled something about not betting on a sure thing and then offered, "Two to one on anything you say."

"Well," I decided after thinking a minute, "if they don't play, I'll buy you a dozen packages of cigarettes; and if they do, you'll buy every girl on the team a box of candy."

"It's a go," he agreed. "Gee, I wish they would really do it. It would be some sport."

"They really will; don't worry about

that," I assured him. "You 'll have to play according to our rules though, or it would be too easy for you."

"Make the men all wear skirts, too," Tim suggested.

"Let us be the yumpires?" Antonino begged. "When is this game to come off?"

"Friday afternoon," I decided. "We get out at three-thirty and don't play at school on Fridays. You 'd better begin saving up your money for the candy, McGraw."

"I 'm not worrying," he called after me, as I started up to the house. "You have n't any team yet."

CHAPTER XV

A SCRAP OF PAPER AND A BASKETBALL GAME

I NEVER used to be superstitious. In fact I had n't much use for people who were. But now I know that there is something queer about Fridays, and I treat them with caution. So would you, if you had lived through one such sixth day in the week as I did.

Things began to go wrong from the start. I could n't find my Spanish book and was late for school. When we went in for morning exercises, Sister Agatha announced that Sister Thecla was ill and that she would therefore lead the prayers.

Madelon and I were on the back row, because of my lateness, and we got through the first hymn serenely. Then came

prayers, and according to the custom of the school, we knelt on the floor with our hands clasped on the back of the bench in front of us. The wooden backs came down to the seats only at the ends; in between was an opening about six inches wide. Sister Agatha's voice droned on and on until my knees ached and my back refused to stay up straight another instant.

"I dare you to stick your head through, Jean Graves," Madelon whispered, when from sheer exhaustion we had sunk down and were sitting on our legs.

But I was n't so easily tempted.

"Double dare," she whispered again.

Of course nobody ever refuses a double dare, so I turned my head sideways and stuck it through the opening in the bench in front of me. Madelon was only a second behind me and had turned in the opposite direction so that we faced each other.

"Prisoners in the stocks," she giggled.

“Amen!” boomed a distant voice, and scrambling sounds began as the school rose to its feet. I hastily withdrew my head — as far as the ears. Farther it would n’t go. Either the opening had shrunk, or my brain had unaccountably expanded. I twisted and tugged, — and stayed where I was.

“Madelon, I’m stuck,” I gasped, but I could no longer see anything of my side-partner except her shoes. *Her* head had not grown larger while she knelt.

Every one was standing by this time and, although Madelon explained afterward that she tried her best to hide me with her skirt, the rest of the row had discovered my plight. Being girls, they giggled, mildly at first and then, as more and more of them caught on and turned to stare, so loudly that the whole room was in an uproar. Sister Agatha’s voice, cold and angry, came vaguely to my ears, but I was too much embarrassed and too busy to pay much

attention to it. Madelon and several other girls had come to my assistance and were trying, between fits of laughter, to get me out.

“Slide down till you come to a wider place.”

“Turn on the other side.”

“Pull harder.”

“Turn on your back.”

I tried to follow everybody’s advice at once and just stuck the tighter. “Tilt the darn bench, you bloomin’ idiot,” I shouted,—and looked up (being practically on my back by this time) into the stony countenance of Sister Agatha.

Of course my head slipped out quite easily as soon as she took charge, and she refused to believe that I had not done the whole thing on purpose. After it was all over, I went into sewing with the others and Martha whispered, giggling, “Got a lecture for being too pious, did n’t you?”

If she had n’t been so lacking in sisterly

sympathy, I might have felt worse about what happened later. As it was, I could n't help laughing, although I did feel sorry for her.

In the middle of the sewing period Sister Agatha suddenly darted from the table where she had been cutting out wash bags and swooped down on one of the side aisles.

“A note!” she cried, straightening up, with a piece of white paper in her hand. “A note!” It sounded as though she were saying a bomb, or a dagger, or a snake, and the room grew deathly still.

She deliberately opened the note and read it through slowly before she spoke. “Will the young lady who wrote this — this missive kindly stand up,” she ordered in her severest tones.

Martha rose to her feet, blushing violently. “I wrote it,” she acknowledged.

Sister Agatha seemed a trifle disconcerted. I think she had been hoping I would prove to be the culprit. Then she evidently

decided that it was all in the family, anyway, so she might as well make the best of it.

“This is an unheard-of occurrence,” she declared, glaring at poor Martha as though she would like to eat her. “Such a thing has never happened in this school before. None of our girls would be so dishonorable as to pass a note. I am —”

Thérèse was waving her hand so frantically that Sister Agatha was forced to acknowledge it.

“Martha’s not the only one who passes notes,” the French girl declared hotly. “We all do — and I don’t see anything dishonorable about it.”

“Lots of us pass notes.” “Of course we do —” Several others chimed in, and Sister Agatha was obliged to change her method of attack.

“In that case, since there was no intention of secrecy or underhandedness,” she informed the class, “Martha will be glad to share the contents of the note with us.

Go to the front of the room, Martha, and read it out loud."

"Oh, no, please," Martha begged, on the verge of tears. "Please don't make me do that."

But Sister Agatha put the note into her hands, pushed her up the aisle and stood over her while she read.

"Oh, T.," she began, blushing harder than ever, "I'm so glad I'm going to spend the week-end with you. I hope J. can go on the picnic. He has the most wonderful eyes (oh, please, Sister Agatha, don't make me read it!) — and thrills me to death when he looks at me you know how. (I can't read any more — I can't.) I told you what W. said about your being different from any one else in the world and all that, so don't forget your promise about J. and P."

She finished all in one breath at full speed, tore the fatal paper into a thousand bits and stalked back to her seat with her

head high in the air. I had to admit that she was plucky and that I could never have gone through with it as well, for the class was roaring and Thérèse had turned every color of the rainbow. But then there was n't much danger of my getting into trouble by writing slushy notes.

There were plenty of other ways to get there, though, as I soon discovered. After school Martha came out from an interview with Sister Agatha, with her chin still pointing skyward, and departed with Thérèse for her week-end at La Patrie. Then Mary Deane, Madelon, Christine Dann, Anna Larkin, Rose Chattam and I put on our bloomers under our skirts, thinking that the best way to smuggle them past Sister Agatha, and set out for the barracks. These were n't our best basketball players — in fact, Anna was about the worst — but they were the only ones who had had the afternoon free and been good enough sports to volunteer.

The court was freshly marked and rolled, we discovered when we reached it, and practically all the men not on the team or on duty that afternoon were lined up along the side lines. We went into the house to take off our skirts and put on middy blouses, and I found that Mother and Dad had gone out for a ride. I had decided not to tell them about the game until the last minute, just in case they should object, though I really did n't expect them to, so I was n't broken-hearted at their absence.

The men cheered when we marched on to the field, but the real noise came when the marine team lockstepped out from the barracks, ribbons flying in the breeze, picture hats flopping and skirts of all lengths and colors over their uniforms. I could n't imagine where they had collected so many clothes in that womanless Post until I recognized an old green silk petticoat of mine, which came just to McGraw's knees and made him look like

an overgrown ballet dancer. Then I spotted other loot from our storeroom and from Mrs. Hunter's, and I began to suspect that Jimmy had n't been far away when the team costumed itself.

They were all gotten up in most fearful and wonderful style, but Shorty Davis, the diminutive side-center, took the prize, hobbling around in the black satin evening dress I had worn to the New Year's fête, with a bright green sash draped over one shoulder and a gold-lace boudoir cap perched on top of a row of red-woolen curls.

McGraw pirouetted gracefully to my side and saluted. "At your service, Sergeant," he piped in a would-be feminine voice.

"Do I win my bet?" I demanded.

"You do — after you 've played."

So I explained the rules, more or less, while the players listened a little and the umpires not at all, and then the teams lined up for the whistle, which was the dinner gong in Antonino's practised hands.

The men thought that of course they would just have to pretend to play, but when we plunked the ball in the basket three times in the first five minutes, they began to wake up and realize that with skirts and girls' rules and Tony calling rounds every few minutes because he was more used to prize-fighting than basketball, it was n't going to be so easy to beat us. Their best chance came when our entire team collapsed in a fit of giggles at the sight of Shorty Davis, having given up all attempts at separating his feet far enough to run, moving about by hops and broad jumps, at each of which he shed one of his crimson curls.

The audience howled and shrieked advice to their team of ladies and applauded both sides with equal enthusiasm whenever a goal was made. The score was a tie,— eight to eight. Shorty had just tripped over his own feet and fallen headfirst into his boudoir cap; Anna Larkin, her face

scarlet and her mouth wide open, had her arms firmly clasped round McGraw's green petticoat in a hopeless effort to stop him in a dash across center; Madelon and the forward she was guarding were having what seemed to be a tug-of-war with the latter's straw hat; and I was lying flat on my back with the ball in my arms and Lyman standing over me, waiting for me to get up — when the howls of the audience abruptly ceased, the players stopped as if frozen in their tracks, and Lyman, backing away from me, cried to high heaven, "Holy Cats! Look who's here!"

I jumped to my feet and stared at the driveway. Then I rubbed my eyes and stared again. But the dilapidated buggy and the white horse refused to disappear, and the two black-gowned figures in the front seat of the buggy were only too familiar. For the first time in history, Sisters from the Holy Cross Convent were

paying a visit to the Marine Barracks, and one of them, of course, was named Agatha.

Is it any wonder that I have lost my fondness for Fridays? As it turned out, though, things might have been worse. Sister Agatha had been coming to tell Mother about Martha's note-passing proclivities, but the sight she saw on the way almost put that minor offense out of her mind. Mother and Dad drove up while the buggy was still keeping the basketball game in a state of suspended animation. Explanations and expressions of opinion followed, and in due course an armistice was signed and certain terms of peace were imposed.

Jimmy, as usual, managed to get something to his advantage out of the rumpus. As a concession to Sister Agatha's feelings, Mother had promised to send her two wayward daughters to their rooms immediately after supper for a week. When we meekly trotted up the stairs on Monday evening,

we found that our small brother had already retired and locked both of his doors.

“Jimmy,” Martha suggested sweetly, “would n’t you like us to come in and watch the moving pictures with you?”

“Nothin’ doin’,” he answered briefly and to the point.

“Drat the child,” said Martha, not so sweetly. “Can’t we possibly see them from your room, Jane?”

“Only half the sheet,” I lamented. “The chimney cuts off the rest.”

So we stooped to bargaining. “What do you want to let us in?” I shouted through the keyhole.

“A nickel apiece,” decreed the lord of our fate, without a moment’s hesitation.

“Might as well fork it out, had n’t we?” Martha asked, and I nodded. A minute later we stuck our five-cent pieces under the door.

“That’s not enough,” the child profiteer announced coldly.

"You said a nickel, Jimmy Graves,"
Martha replied indignantly.

"Yes, but you forgot the two centh war
takth," he lisped gently but firmly. "It 's
theven thenth a night, but I might make
thpecial rateth by the week."

When I told Daddy about it, he said that
if none of Jimmy's other careers panned
out, he could always be sure of a success
in high finance.

CHAPTER XVI

A VISIT FROM THE COMMISSION

“HURRY up, Jinks!” Father shouted up the stairs one afternoon early in April. “The boat’s almost in, and it would never do to keep their royal commissionerships waiting.”

“Coming right away,” I called back, as I pulled my floppy Chachas hat over my eyes and took a parting look in the mirror to see if I were really as sunburned as my white organdie dress made me look.

The rest of the family were already in the car, with the Major and Captain and Mrs. Hunter. A khaki-colored squad was just disappearing down the road to town, and four motorcyclists were waiting to escort us.

"I feel like a bloomin' parade," Jimmy cried excitedly, as the car snorted and plunged forward.

"Well, it's not every day we're honored by the visit of a sure-enough guaranteed genuine committee from the States, bent on investigating and improving our modest little island," the Major replied, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I don't think we need improving," Jimmy declared loyally. "But I'm glad they're coming, 'cause there's to be a parade drill and all sorts of big eats."

The gangplank was being lowered as we reached the dock, and the marines were lined up at attention on either side. Father and the other officers took their places at the heads of the columns, and Mother stayed in the car, but we slipped out, having been forewarned not to expect a ride home, and pushed as near the front of the crowd as we could.

A number of deckhands hurried down

the plank and helped the men on the wharf make it fast. Then came a dozen marines and as many sailors, and after them five portly gentlemen, who would have looked more natural in frock coats and high hats than they did in white drill and Panamas.

“Gee, they all look like twins,” whispered Jimmy. “Here’s some more marines and — Sis, look quick at Billy Murdock. What’s he doing?”

I saw him immediately and stared in surprise. He had slipped away from his place in the rear line and was talking rapidly to a blond, sullen-looking deck-hand, whose shoulders he grasped tightly with both hands.

Lieutenant Porter had evidently noticed the tableau at the same instant. “Murdock,” he commanded, “get back into line.”

Billy did n’t pay the slightest attention. He was shaking the deck hand now and seemed to be asking questions to which he

could get no answers. The commissioners and officers were exchanging greetings and compliments so noisily that we could n't hear a word he was saying.

We saw Lieutenant Porter stride over to Murdock and, white with anger, order him once more to get back to his place. Murdock, turning a minute from his victim, shook his head stubbornly, and when the lieutenant tried to take him by the arm, shook himself free and gave that astonished officer a hearty shove in the ribs.

Jimmy looked at me in open-mouthed amazement, and I could only stare stupidly back. In another minute two of the men had Murdock by the arms, and under Lieutenant Porter's commands were marching him up the road in the dust of the slowly-moving car.

“Well, I 'll be jelly-jashed-jammed !”
Jimmy always invented new expressions in moments of greatest excitement.
“What ever hath got into old Murdock ?”

"What do you suppose it was all about?" Martha inquired, gazing in bewilderment up the dusty road. "They 'll put him in the fortress for disobeying Lieutenant Porter, I suppose. Well, he surely deserved it!"

"There must have been some reason for his doing it," I temporized. Somehow I could n't help wanting to stand up for Billy, even though he had acted so queerly ever since we had been at St. Thomas.

"Let 's talk to that old boy," Jimmy suggested, pointing to the deckhand, who was still standing where Murdock had left him, a dazed look on his face and his hands stuck deep in his overall pockets.

Jimmy, being the only man in the party, took the lead.

"What did Murdock say to you, and what 's your name?" he demanded, planting himself squarely in front of the stranger.

The man eyed him sullenly.

"I don 't know vat he wanted," he

muttered finally. "I nefer saw him before. I think he iss crazy."

"Why, you 're German!" I exclaimed.
"What 's your name?"

"I am nod German. I am Swees. My name iss François Javal."

"All right, François," I agreed hastily, for he was glaring at me in a far from friendly manner. "Anything you say! Do you work on this boat?"

"Yess," he replied shortly and turned his back on us to indicate that the conversation was ended.

We tried to make him tell us something about his meeting with Murdock, but he refused to say another word, and we finally gave him up in despair and started home, puzzling our brains for some explanation of Billy's behavior.

There was a big dinner at the barracks that night in honor of the Commissioners, and we hung around in the court, waiting for the moving pictures to begin and

getting away with several pints of chocolate ice cream that Tony sneaked out to us. I was anxious for some news about Billy and walked down to the fort when the men went to change guard.

Timmons was coming off duty, and I tried to pump him, but he said that all he knew was that Murdock had been locked up and would be court-martialed to-morrow or the next day, and that he refused to say a word.

“Nuts, if you ask me,” the old sergeant remarked, tapping his head. “It looks sort of bad for him, seein’s how the Lieut. is consid’rable het up at the insult to his dignity, and besides, they’ve been and found out that there rope-hauler Murdock was so set on confabbing with is a Boche.”

“I thought he was!” I cried. “How did he ever happen to be on that English steamship?”

“Well, I don’t rightly know, Miss Jane. But they say they were short-handed up to

Porto Rico and took on some extra hands. That's just what they say, mind you; I don' *know* nothin'."

"What else do they say, Timmons?" I asked, knowing that this was the only way to get any information from him.

"Well, of course I don' know how much truth there is in it," he hinted cautiously. "As I hears it, the name of this Boche is Franz Zeitler, and he's got some relatives living on this here island."

"He has? How do you know?"

"I don' know," he corrected me sternly. "I don' know nothin' about it at all. I'm just tellin' you that they said he was followed when he went off on shore leave late this afternoon, and he went to a certain house—I'm not knowing where, mind you—and talked a lot of Boche talk to the people in it and acted like a reg'lar fam'ly reunion."

"And what do they say about Murdock talking to him?" I prompted.

But Timmons refused to part with any more information and made off abruptly for the mess room.

Jimmy had saved a seat for me, and I told him all I had been able to find out.

“I don’t see that it explains anything, though, do you?” I asked, when I had finished the little I knew of Franz’s autobiography. “If Billy had any dealings with that old German, he would n’t rush up to him in front of the whole company and officers and commissioners and the rest of the mob on that wharf, would he?”

“I ’ll think about it,” Jimmy offered graciously and turned his entire attention to the cowboys on the screen.

The next morning there was a big drill in the parade grounds, with lots of special marching and firing of cannons and polite compliments by the visitors. In the afternoon, following an official luncheon in town, there was an athletic carnival in Emancipation Park. The little Spicks

from the public school paraded and danced and sang songs. They were every shade from the inkiest black to pale tan, and they all wore white and carried American flags. They were so solemn about it all and tried so hard to keep in step and in time with the band, that they made a hit with everybody. Then our school teams played an exhibition basketball game. The Sisters had gotten so used to seeing us in bloomers that they did n't object at all when Father asked their permission, and even though most of the town people had no idea what it was all about, they cheered and clapped and seemed to enjoy it almost as much as the marines did.

I had decided to ask Father's permission to talk to Billy, but as a result of all the festivities, I did n't have a chance to see him alone until after supper that evening, when the Commissioners had gone back to their hotel to rest up for a long motor trip the next morning. And then when I

told him what I wanted to do, he flatly refused to let me.

“But, Dad,” I protested, “I know there’s something to be said on Billy’s side, and maybe he will talk to me.”

“Possibly,” Father replied, squinting into the stem of his pipe with a worried expression. “Just at present, however, Murdock is under guard for breaking ranks, engaging in conversation, which he refuses to explain, with a German deckhand, disobeying and — er — shoving an officer. I can see no possible reason for waiving regulations to let you have a chat with him.”

“But I might find something out,” I insisted.

“That will be up to the court-martial to-morrow, my dear. In the meantime, I’ll have to forbid your making any attempt to see Murdock.”

And having pronounced this heartless ultimatum, Daddy lit his pipe and strolled down the path into the garden.

CHAPTER XVII

I DISOBEY MY SUPERIOR OFFICER

I SAT on the porch railing for several minutes after Daddy left me, trying to decide what to do. I was pretty sure that if I told Father everything I knew about Billy, he would let me see him; but I had promised not to tell.

Besides, I wanted to rescue him "on my own." I could see the grim court-martial, with Billy, white and trembling, and all the officers, even my own Father, sternly sentencing him to dishonorable discharge or imprisonment or—even death, for Lieutenant Porter might [claim that Billy had actually struck him. But I would have discovered the secret of his strange behavior and would rush in just in time to save him.

It would have made a lovely movie, and I had always wanted to be a heroine, not the dimpled, curly-haired kind but a sort of Joan of Arc, forever being brave and noble on a white horse.

“Alas,” I sighed to myself, “it is not to be! I have n’t any horse, and I don’t know how to get to Billy and I have n’t the ghost of an idea what’s the matter with him, anyhow.”

I got up from the railing and wandered aimlessly into the house. Mother had gone out to join Daddy in the garden, and Martha and Jimmy were over at the Hunters’. As I passed the table, I noticed a pile of letters and papers and fingered them idly, wondering who had met the mail boat. There was only one envelope addressed to me, but it was postmarked “Peekskill, N. Y.”

“Dear Jane,” I read, when I had hurriedly torn it open. “Indeed, I do remember you very well, and I was so glad

to get your letter — gladder than you can possibly imagine. For it brought news of Billy, and, Jane, do you know, it is the first news of him we have had for nearly two years. We heard in July, 1918, that he had been taken prisoner. Before that he had been writing regularly, but neither Uncle James nor I have had a letter since, though we found out through the War Department that Billy had been released after the armistice was signed.

“You can imagine how terribly anxious and unhappy I have been. I had just about made up my mind that he must be dead, when your letter came. It seemed too good to be true. But I’m still unhappy because I can’t understand his not writing. Please ask him to write to me and to Uncle Jim right away — and won’t you try to find out why he has n’t written a word all this time. I have n’t the least idea.

“I’ll send you a real letter soon, but I just can’t wait to get this off and hear

from Billy. Thank you ever and ever and ever so much for writing to me.

“With love to you and to my brother,
“Barbara Murdock.”

I read it all through twice.

“Now, I have to see Billy,” I decided.
“This is a sign.”

I thought and thought how I could possibly manage it and finally decided that the best way would be to go down in the canoe and try to slip into the passage when the marine on guard outside the fort was on the town side. Once inside, I could prowl around until I found Billy's cell and talk to him through the grilled opening when the sentry was n't looking.

It worked like a charm as far as getting into the passage was concerned, and as, flashlight in hand, I hurried to the door at the other end, I felt as though I had the Maid of Orleans and the Statue of Liberty and all other famous female heroines skinned a mile.

With my free hand I fumbled round my neck for the ribbon on which I always hung the key. There didn't seem to be any ribbon, — but of course I knew that there must be.

Then I suddenly remembered that when I put on my blue dress that afternoon, the neck had been so low that the key ribbon showed, and I had taken it off and put it in my bureau drawer. I remembered it, once my memory started working, only too well; but I hunted anyhow in all my pockets and in the blouse of my dress and down my back and even in my sleeves before I finally gave it up and dropped into a chair.

“Of all idiots, Jane Graves,” I assured myself, “you take the cake. Some heroine! Well, I suppose I'll have to beat it back to the house and get the key.”

I started to the entrance, — but after a couple of steps I came back and sat down, feeling too weak in the knees to do any-

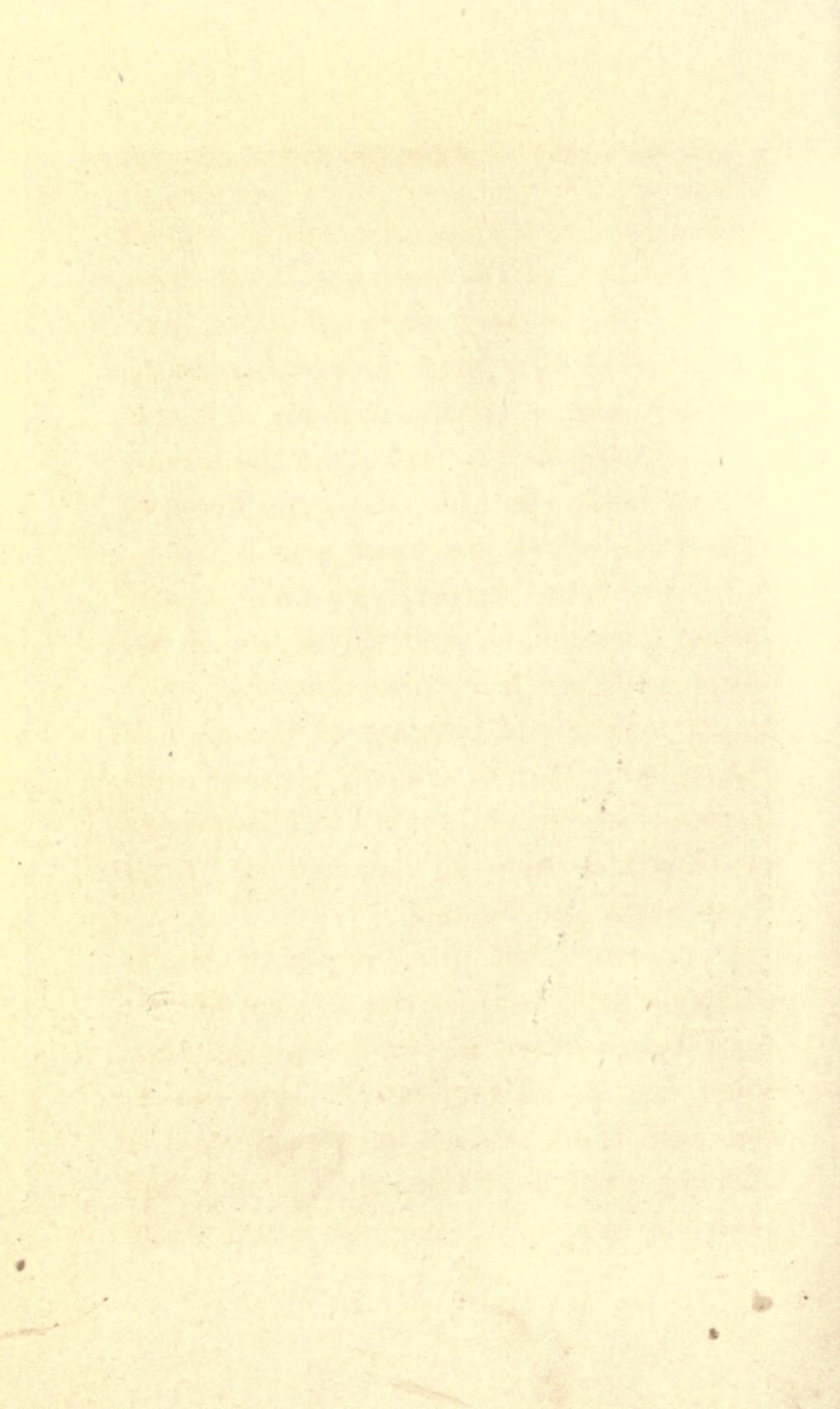
thing else. I had let the stone fall into place behind me, and I knew from bitter experience that that stone could only be moved from the outside. Once before I had shut it by mistake and had had a hectic quarter of an hour sneaking out through the fort and coming back in a rowboat to rescue the *Sweetheart*. I discovered then that the stone moved inward on hinges in its right side but could n't be pulled toward you from the inside because there was nothing to take hold of. It had been a lark that other time, but now I could n't get into the fort.

"I 'm n — not a bit scared," I told the obstinate stone. "Some one will find me."

I could n't say it very convincingly, though. Not a single person knew of the secret passage, and the stone walls were so thick that I could shout for a month and not be heard, unless some one came into the cellar, which was n't often visited since it was only used as a storehouse for



Horrid ghostly echoes were the only answer.—*Page 241.*



junk, or unless I should be able to attract the attention of the men who came down to fire the battery three times a day. They had already fired the evening salute, and they took so short a time about it that unless I happened to strike just the minute or two before or after the guns boomed, they would n't do me much good.

"A first-class rescuer, you are," I said rather quaveringly, and the sound of my voice made me feel worse than ever, so I began yelling and banging on the door of the cellar. Horrid, ghostly echoes were the only answers, and when I was hoarse and my knuckles were all battered up, I sat down again and thought.]

I thought that the *Sweetheart* would probably drift away as the tide got higher, for I had beached her carelessly, and then some one would find her floating out to sea and think I was drowned. And I thought what a perfect little idiot I had been not to tell Father all about Billy

instead of running off and deliberately disobeying his orders. And I wished that I had never heard of Joan of Arc and had led a better life generally, and wondered whether I could die of fright or slow starvation, and who would find my bones years later — and then the flashlight went out!

I thought I had lost my voice, but I had n't. All the time that I was frantically trying to turn the light on again and discovering that the battery must be worn out, I was yelling at the top of my lungs. Then I suddenly remembered all Poe's stories about people being buried alive and, picking up one of the chairs, I banged it against the cellar door until it broke to pieces (the chair, not the door, alas!).

After that I grew sort of coldly resigned to my awful fate and tried to say some prayers and repent of my sins, but I was too excited to remember any prayer except "give us this day our daily bread" and the only sin I could think of was that I had

swiped the box of chocolates Lieutenant Porter gave Martha, so I got up again and began feeling around the walls in the forlorn hope of finding another opening.

The stone was rough and cold and hopelessly immovable, but I kept on around the room because I could n't think of anything else to do. Suddenly my hand slipped into a hole about on a level with my eyes. I gave a shout and reached into it frantically with both hands, but it proved to be only the entrance to a small pocket in the wall, which was filled with papers. I pulled them out angrily, not even surprised to find them there, and so great was my disappointment that I did n't have the heart to search any farther. Instead I lay down on the floor, buried my face in a pillow and cried like a baby.

“Jane! Sergeant Jane!” some one was calling. I sat up, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. I had been having a horrible

nightmare, I remembered. My hand touched something hard / and cold; it was so dark I could n't see an inch in front of me. Then I realized that I was really in the passage, and it was n't a dream at all.

“Sergeant Jane, are you in there?”

The voice was real, too, it seemed.

“Here I am,” I tried to shout, but it sounded more like a chicken squawking.

“What 's the matter? Are you locked in?” the voice demanded. It came from behind the door into the cellar, and I groped my way toward it.

“How did you know where to find me?” I asked curiously.

“Never mind about that now. Where 's the key?”

“In my top bureau drawer.”

“Sit tight, and I 'll have you out in a jiffy.”

The voice moved away, and I sat down to wait confidently for its return. Who

was it that had found me? I wondered. It did n't sound like Daddy or Captain Hunter or Timmons or any of the men from the barracks. And how had he ever known where to look? And had it been three months or only two since I straightened out my top bureau drawer?

In an incredibly short time I heard footsteps in the cellar, and then the joyful sound of the key turning in the lock. In a glare of lanterns and flashlights, as the door swung open, I saw Mother and Daddy, their faces white and frightened. Martha and Jimmy were there too and a lot of other people, but Father had me in his arms before I could see them plainly, and the next thing I knew I was lying on the couch in the living room at home, not quite sure how I had reached there, the lights had been so blinding after being shut up in the pitch dark.

“Oh, Dad, I 'm so sorry,” I apologized, sitting up so that I could see him better.

“I disobeyed you and was trying to get to Billy, and it served me right; but it was awful to be locked in there and think there was n’t any one who knew where to look for me! Who thought of my being there?”

“I did, Sergeant,” a familiar voice answered, and I looked up to see Lieutenant Duncan striding across the room.

“Why, where did you come from?” I demanded, staring at him rudely.

“Came in on the New York boat this evening to take charge of the Commission’s marine escort,” he replied, grinning cheerfully. “Mills got sick at St. Croix. It was a darn good thing for you he did, too, young lady. I prophesied that you would open that door for me some day, but it turned out the other way.”

“They found the *Sweetheart* bottom thide up down by the drydock,” Jimmy broke in, adding blithely, “Gee! Sis, we thought you were drowned for sure!”

"We had all the launches and rowboats out and every man in the barracks scouring the shore," Martha took up the tale. "Then Lieutenant Duncan happened to heah about it at the hotel and found where you were and came back for the key and us. Why did n't you evah tell us about the passage, silly?"

"Did you find any buried treasure?" Jimmy inquired with renewed interest. "What 's that in your hand?"

I looked down in surprise, not realizing that I had been clutching something in my left hand. "Ugh!" I shuddered. "They are some horrid old papers I found in a hole in the wall — after the light went out." I shuddered again as I remembered the feeling of the cold stone all around me, and threw the packet of letters on the floor.

"Let 's look," cried Jimmy eagerly, grabbing them as they fell. "Let 's read 'em."

"Not now, son," Father said quietly. "Give them to me and we'll look them over to-morrow. It's after midnight, and we must all go to bed."

Mother packed us off upstairs and insisted upon making Lieutenant Duncan a bed on the couch.

"Indeed you will stay with us," I heard her insisting, "not only to-night, but all the time you're here. When I think how we would be feeling now and where Jane would be if you hadn't come —" She broke off abruptly and pretended to be very busy fixing the pillows on the couch.

"Yes, but remember I was responsible for her knowing about that damn — I beg your pardon, Mrs. Graves; that slipped out — that dangerous place, and it would have been my —" Lieutenant Duncan's voice trailed off into an unintelligible murmur as he followed Mother into the kitchen.

I called to Father when he came upstairs,

and he came and stood in the door of my room.

"I want to tell you, Daddy," I said, trying to sound unconcerned, "that I think you should break me — demote me, you know. Nobody ought to be a sergeant who can't obey orders."

"Just as you say, Jane," he replied gravely. "But you will tell me all about it, won't you?"

"To-morrow," I promised, standing on tiptoes to kiss him goodnight.

CHAPTER XVIII

BILLY EXPLAINS

“**S**o we were n’t the only ones who knew about the passage, after all,” Lieutenant Duncan said, grinning at my woebegone expression as I folded up the last letter and stuck it back into the packet.

We had all — all, that is, except Daddy, who had gone into town to see the Commissioners off and arrange a few days’ leave for Mr. Duncan — been spending the early morning out on the porch, investigating the papers I had found in the wall of the secret passage.

There were a dozen letters, mostly written in German which Martha and the Lieutenant between them managed to

translate, several sheets of memoranda and a small map. Jimmy's hopes revived at the sight of the map, and he was all prepared to start off on a treasure hunt, but it proved to be nothing but an ordinary colored map of the Virgin Islands with a great many small black crosses on it in different places.

The notes were disconnected words and figures that Lieutenant Duncan decided represented statistics as to the population, imports and such things of the islands.

The letters were all written by a German soldier who signed himself "Franz", and addressed to either "liebe Mina" or "my dear brother." The envelopes had evidently been destroyed, and there was no clue to any of the people's surnames. The letters themselves told for the most part of the writer's experiences in the trenches, and there were many bitter allusions in those of later date to the "traitorous Americans" who had "come

into the war on the wrong side." In some of the letters to "brother" there were instructions for stirring up the negroes of the islands against the English and Americans and for sending information back to Germany. The last letter was dated October, 1918.

"Yes, we 've found out that some one else knows about our passage," I agreed, "but that 's about all we have found out. These might have been exciting enough two years ago, but they 're all out of date now. Isn't that just my luck!"

"I think they 're still interesting," Mother remarked, looking up from her sewing. "You know there was quite a little secret-service work done here during the war by the marine officers. They found several spies and made some pretty rigid investigations, and most of the Germans suddenly became Danish or Swiss. Major Elliot was here then, and he was telling me about it the other night."

“Evidently some devoted admirer of the Kaiser did n’t wish to have any incriminating evidence found on his person,” Lieutenant Duncan suggested, tapping the letters.

“Well, he had a good hiding place,” I admitted. “I wonder why he did n’t get them back after the war was over.”

“Probably the fort was a little too well guarded to make it worth his while to bother about them.”

“I’d love to know who they are, would n’t you? There are still such a lot of Germans on St. Thomas that we could never find them.”

“I’ll look out for Mina and for Franz and his brother,” Jimmy promised. “I’d sort of like to be a detective, I think. Say, that Franz was a nice chap, was n’t he?”

“Horrible!” Martha shuddered. “Is n’t the calm way he tells about murdering those women and children ghastly?”

“What struck me as the cruellest thing of all,” Lieutenant Duncan remarked, “is his description of the trick they played on that poor Yank prisoner. Where is that letter?”

Just as he found it, Father came up the path and, after stopping for a minute to assure the Lieutenant that the Commissioners thought they could get along without him for two more days, he put his arm through mine and walked me into the house with him.

“Now tell me all about everything,” he ordered, as I curled up on the couch beside him.

So I began at the beginning and told him all I knew or imagined about Billy Murdock, and finally I ran upstairs and brought down Barbara’s letter for Father to read.

“Get your hat,” he said, when he had finished the letter. “We’re going to call on Murdock without another minute’s delay.”

We found Billy, looking white and miserable, sitting on the cot in his cell.

“We’ve come to have a little talk with you, Murdock,” Father began quietly, as he returned Billy’s salute. “May we sit down?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Billy nervously.

So Daddy sat down beside him on the cot, and I sat on the wooden stool in the corner.

“I want you to believe that we’re your friends, Murdock,” Father began. “We’d like to help you if we possibly can, but I don’t believe we can do anything unless you’re willing to be perfectly frank with us.”

Billy started to answer; then broke off and buried his face in his hands.

“If it will make it any easier for you to talk,” Father assured him kindly, “I can promise that if you do not wish it, nothing you say to us shall go any further. Jane has told me that you have been unlike

yourself down here, and if you 're in trouble, she wants to help you — and so do I."

"You 're too good to me, sir," Billy muttered, not raising his head. "But there 's nothing you can do."

Father looked at me despairingly and shook his head as though he thought it was a hopeless task.

I made up my mind that I would at least make him show signs of life.

"Billy," I said. "Here 's a letter from Barbara."

He jumped to his feet so suddenly that we both started.

"Where ?" he asked hoarsely. "Show it to me. What does she say ?"

"If you 'll sit down and listen quietly," I bribed, "I 'll read it all to you."

While I was reading, his eyes never left my face, but when I had finished, he whispered "God bless her" and covered his face again. I thought that he was crying and was hoping that Daddy would

think of something to say, when suddenly he stood up again. His face was whiter than ever, but there were no signs of tears, and he held his head high.

“I think I ’ll tell you, sir,” he said to Father very quietly. “It ’s been too much for me to keep to myself. You see how I ’ve had to treat my sister, who is dearer to me than anything in the world. I ’ve let her think me dead — and I want her to think so again — rather than to know that I ’m — a traitor !”

He shuddered at the last word but did n’t break down. Father reached up and pulled him back to the cot.

“Now, tell me all about it, my boy,” he said gently, putting an arm around Billy’s shoulders. This unexpected kindness was too much for the boy, but he finally controlled himself and told his story.

“I was with the 4th Regiment, Company A, in Belleau Woods, sir, as you know. I had only been with them a few days —

came up with some replacements. My buddy — Jim Wilson — went West our first day up. It got me rather badly. I guess I was still pretty shaky from the flu.

“One night we went out — a patrol of six men — to try to find out if the Boches were planning an attack. Our bit of line was very weakly held — more replacements had been due but had n’t gotten through — and our only hope was that the Boche would n’t discover our weakness.

“We got across No Man’s Land without any trouble, but within a few feet of their trenches somebody made a noise, and in a second a dozen Fritzies were on top of us. I remember a huge form towering over me and a whizzing sound. When I came to, I was lying in a sort of dugout, and a fat blonde Boche was holding my head as tenderly as if I ’d been his best girl.”

Billy stopped a minute, breathless. It was the first time he had told his story, and he seemed to be living it over again.

Neither Father nor I made a sound, and soon he went on.

“I could n’t guess why he was being so kind to me, and he surprised me even more, for as soon as he saw my eyes were open, he grinned at me horribly and grunted, ‘Well, Mr. Yank, how feel you by now? Ve are very, very grateful to you, yah! You haf don us one great favor.’

“I could n’t imagine what he was driving at and told him so.

“Then he said — I can see him leering now — ‘You pretend you don’t remember, heh? You don’t want your friends to know you betrayed them, nein? Nefer mind all that; you told us where to attack, so we haf your live saved. Ah-hah — dey’re off!’

“‘You ’re a liar!’ I shrieked furiously.

“I would n’t believe it — I would n’t let myself. It made me physically sick just to think about it. But the Germans were certainly attacking, and the man who led me back to the detention camp knew all

about it and told me that the rest of my patrol had been killed and my life alone spared, in return for the information I had given. The other prisoners heard about it and ostracized me.

“I still kept hoping against hope that it was n’t true, but when the armistice was signed and I came back to my company, I found that the Boches had made a surprise attack that night and killed the captain and over thirty men. I feel as though I had murdered them. Even if I betrayed them unconsciously, that only makes the thing worse; it proves I’m a coward and a traitor at heart. Now you know what’s been the matter with me! Now you know —”

“Billy! Billy!” I shouted. I had had my mouth open for two minutes, but not a sound had come before. “Billy, you did n’t betray them at all! I know all about it. That awful old Boche made it all up and wrote to his brother about it.”

Billy and Father stared at me wild-eyed.

“It was just a trick he made up to get even with you because he hated all Americans for coming into the war,” I hurried on breathlessly. “It’s all in one of those letters I found in the passage. Franz, his name was, and they knew about your line being weak and had that attack all planned before they ever saw you. It was just his idea of a practical joke — ‘another example of their despicable Kultur’ Lieutenant Duncan called it. So you’re not a traitor at all, Billy; you’re not!”

They still stared at me in bewilderment, although Billy’s face had lightened wonderfully, and I had to explain in minutest detail all about the letters I had found, one of which contained the account of just such a trick as had been played on Billy.

“But how can you be sure it was me he wrote about?” Billy asked doubtfully.

“Of course it was,” I protested stoutly.

“It seems quite likely,” Father agreed,

"and even if it were n't, I 'm sure that Billy had the same thing happen to him."

"Are you really?" the boy questioned eagerly. "You don't think me a traitor, sir? You won't discharge me from the marines?"

"I 'd be willing to stake my last cent on your loyalty," Father assured him gravely, "but not on your discretion. Whatever made you insult Lieutenant Porter?"

Billy's happy smile vanished. "I had forgotten that, Colonel," he confessed. "I think I must have been half crazy. I was almost mad worrying over this thing and being ashamed to let my sister know I was alive or to have any friends. I was beginning to think I could n't stand it another minute — and when I saw that Boche get off the boat I did n't —"

"That Boche?" Daddy and I repeated in chorus.

"Yes, the one who made me his prisoner. That 's the man I was talking to on the

wharf. I was trying to find out the truth of it all, and he pretended not to remember me. Then I got so excited that I forgot where I was and who Lieutenant Porter was and everything else. I could n't think of anything except getting that dirty Boche to talk."

"Father," I cried excitedly, "Timmons told me that German's name was Franz Zeitler, and the man who wrote the letter was named Franz and they both have relatives here at St. Thomas. It must be the same man!"

"That would be a lucky coincidence!" Daddy exclaimed. "Your Franz went on with the boat, but we can trace him through the people he visited here. That will prove your innocence unquestionably, Murdock, although I have n't the slightest doubt of it myself without further proof. I will explain the whole thing to the other officers, and I 'm sure you will be let off with a light penalty."

"I can't thank you, Colonel," Billy began, but Father cut him off with a hearty "Good-by and good luck", for he hated to be thanked.

"Say, Sergeant," he called after me shyly, as we started out, "I wonder if you could get me some paper. I want to write a letter."

CHAPTER XIX

SEMPER FIDELIS

MOTHER was doing her hair one afternoon several days later when I dropped down on her bed, being careful not to muss the shams.

“Are you going to the dance to-morrow night?” I asked carelessly.

“Of course, dear,” she answered absently, sticking a big bone hairpin into place. “It’s the last thing given for the Commission, and it’s up to us to be there.”

“Us? Joshua, not the whole family!”

“Oh, no,” Mother laughed. “I hardly think that’s necessary. I’m going to take Martha — although she does n’t know it yet and has nearly pestered me to death —

but I think you and Jimmy may be excused."

"Maybe I could stand it this once, if you think it's my duty. I suppose it would be politer to the Commissioners for us all to be there."

I tried to look like a would-be martyr, but I evidently didn't succeed very well, for Mother started to laugh.

"Jane, Jane," she gasped, wiping her eyes, "since when have your duties weighed so heavily upon you? It's mighty sweet and unselfish of you to offer, and I appreciate your willingness to undergo this hardship for the sake of the family honor — but I don't really believe it will be necessary."

Then I realized that she was n't to be deceived, so I gave up diplomacy and threw myself on her mercy.

"I want to go to that dance, Mother. Please let me," I begged.

I teased and coaxed and pleaded for half

an hour, and Mother just smiled her most beamish smile and murmured, "Remember Norfolk?" and "Next time will be never," and "What about the silly fops?"

Then I began making promises. I promised never to fight with Jimmy or Martha, and always to be on time to meals, and to get ninety in all my lessons and eat string beans and learn to sew and straighten my bureau drawers once a week and never, never say "Oh, Joshua!" — and finally she said, "Well, just this once. But never again until you are seventeen. Now run, dress for dinner."

I went halfway across the hall and then back and stuck my head in the door.

"What do you think about wearing my hair up?" I suggested brightly.

"I don't think about it at all, you ridiculous child. Why, when I was fourteen —"

I did n't wait to hear the rest; I knew it would be discouraging. Instead I went and looked at myself in Martha's long

mirror. I was n't exactly tall, I had to admit, and I was rather thin,—slender sounded better, or willowy. But looking facts squarely in the eye, I felt positive that except for the babyish Russian-blouse dresses Mother made me wear and the childish length of my hair, which was just below my shoulders and had ends that curled up and made it look even shorter, except for these unfair handicaps I looked every day of fifteen !

I had a darling new pale-green dress, made of some soft shimmery stuff, with a really low neck and almost no sleeves, and best of all a broad satin sash instead of an everlasting old patent-leather belt. In that dress I might even look sixteen!—except for my hair. I pulled the comb through the tangles crossly and ran down to dinner.

The dance was to be in the court, and all the next day, after the grass had been cut as short as possible, the men rolled it until

it was as hard and smooth as a prize putting green. A platform was put up at each end, one for our own band and one for an orchestra from the town, and Japanese lanterns were strung on wires all around and across the lawn.

Jimmy and I had to oversee all the preparations and that — and other things — made me a little late getting dressed.

“Are n’t you evah coming down, Jane?”
Martha kept calling up the stairs.

She was out on the porch with a whole bunch of lieutenants who were fighting over her program and fussing with our own lanterns which would n’t stay lighted. I did n’t see why she had to bother about me, and I stayed upstairs just as long as I wanted to. To be perfectly frank, I was a tiny bit scared to come down.

Finally I took a long breath and ran down the stairs. Mother and the Hunters and several of the Commissioners were in the living room, for the music had n’t started.

Mother never raises her voice — at least she says a lady never does, and she usually practices what she preaches — but I guess she forgot for a minute.

“Jane!” she shrieked. “Jane Graves! What have you done to your hair?”

“Bobbed it,” I answered calmly, though my knees seemed a little nervous. “Don’t you like it?”

“Like it? Like it?”

She seemed to be overcome, — and I was n’t sure that it was with pleasure.

“What evah made you do it, Jane?” inquired Mrs. Hunter. “You’ve been having such a time ovah getting it long.”

“It’s a bit impressionistic, is n’t it?” Captain Hunter chuckled. “Or perhaps it’s Bohemian!”

I had done the cutting myself with my manicure scissors, and maybe it was n’t *exactly* even, but there was nothing to make such a fuss over that I could see.

“C — can anything be done?” Mother

asked weakly, shutting her eyes as though she did n't want to look at me.

"I don't know, but I 'll try," Mrs. Hunter offered cheerfully. "Come on, Jane, let me trim you up a bit."

She marched me back to my room and clipped around my head with scissors and a comb for perfect centuries. At last she stood off and looked me over.

"Theah, now, you look civilized at least," she announced. "I really think you look mighty cute, but don't you dahe tell you' Mothah I said so, oah she 'll think I encouraged you in the fihst place. What evah made you do it, Jane?"

"Well, I 'll tell you," I decided, taking a look in the mirror and discovering that I did look less Bolshevikistic than before Mrs. Hunter trimmed me off. "Mother would n't let me put my hair up for the dance, and I looked so young with it hanging over my shoulders that I decided to bob it. Lots of grown people bob their

hair, so no one can tell how old I am now, can they?"

Mrs. Hunter fluffed out my hair on both sides and kissed me before she answered.

"You ah always original, Jane," she said, laughing. "And you look at least twenty-five! I'm only glad you did n't decide you wanted to be sixty and bald!"

By the time I reached the court, it was almost filled with the Commissioners and the officers of their escort and our own officers and more town people than had ever before been invited to a barracks dance.

The music was great — military time at one end and St. Thomas jazz at the other — and I was glad when Bob Duncan suddenly appeared from somewhere and hustled me on to the floor.

"What 's this? What 's this?" he cried, as we passed under one of the lanterns. "Going back to our childhood days? That 's the way you looked at Norfolk."

"Oh — don't you think it makes me look older?" I inquired anxiously.

"Um-m," he pondered deeply. "I'd hardly say older," he decided, crushing heartlessly my fondest hopes. "At least not much. This afternoon you were a demure little girl about eight years old, and now you look like a mischievous small boy of nine."

My spirits fell greatly at this blow, but they could n't stay fallen; I was having too good a time. The Cleret boys were there, and most of Martha's lieutenants thought they would make a hit with her by dancing with her "baby sister", and even if they were patronizing they knew some dandy new steps, and so did Lieutenant Duncan.

And when I went over to get some punch, and Billy smiled at me proudly from behind the bowl and pointed to a corporal's chevron on his sleeve, I was so happy I wanted to squeal.

After the next dance I slipped back to

shake hands with Billy. He was grinning from ear to ear.

“Won’t Barbara be glad?” he demanded, wringing my hand. “I owe it all to you and your Father, Sergeant. I can’t thank —”

“Don’t, Billy. We did n’t do anything, but we ’re both as proud as Punch of you.”

“Do you know what the Colonel said to me, Sergeant? He said, ‘Murdock, you know the meaning of Semper Fidelis, of course?’ ‘Yes, sir,’ I told him. ‘It means always on the job, sir.’ ‘Right,’ he said. ‘You ’ve been faithful as a private, Murdock; now I want you to be even more so as a corporal.’”

“I ’m sure you will, Billy,” I assured him, shaking hands again. Then I hurried back to dance with the least portly of the Commissioners, and I was so amused at the sight of Billy ladling lemonade on to the table in absent-minded bliss that I actually enjoyed it — the one-step, I mean — with the Commissioner.

It was all over lots too soon, and Lieutenant Duncan walked back to the house with me to say good-by, for the Commission was leaving for St. John on the early morning boat, and he had to hurry back to the hotel to set the alarm clocks and pack the bags!

“Why can’t such good times last?” I demanded, as we sat down on the couch hammock to wait for the others. “Wasn’t it fun?”

“It was bully! But you’ll have lots of other times just as good. Remember that night at Norfolk? You never dreamed then that you’d like St. Thomas so much, did you?”

“I should say not,” I had to acknowledge. “I hated to leave Norfolk. But now I love it here even more. It’s the nicest home we’ve ever had — and we’ll have to leave it like all the others!”

“Yes, but the next place will probably be even nicer.”

“Maybe! Sometimes, though, I feel like

a girl without a country. Other girls have homes that *are* homes, and friends that don't get sent away as soon as you begin to know them."

"Oh, I don't feel a bit that way about it," Bob disagreed, very much in earnest. "The whole blessed United States is our home; we know all of her, even to her smallest colonies, while the poor stay-at-homes just know one little corner of New England or Iowa or Texas and think of that as their country."

"Why, I never thought of it that way," I cried, delighted. "That's a great idea, Bob. And we have our own friends, too, in all parts of the country, and we're always meeting new ones and coming across old ones."

"Which is the nicest thing of all," he grinned at me. "Here's hoping that *our* next 'coming across' will be soon."

"And that next time I get in a scrape, you'll appear to pull me out," I added.



“The whole blessed United States is our home.” — *Page 276.*



Then Daddy and Mother and Martha came up on the porch, and we all said good-by and promised to write.

“We ’ll walk down to the gate with you, Lieutenant,” Father offered, slipping his arm into mine, “to wish you one more ‘good luck.’”

After he had gone, we stood together at the gate, watching the tall white figure disappear into the darkness of the road.

“Have a good time to-night, Sergeant Jinks?” Daddy asked, pulling one of my abbreviated locks.

“Scrumptious,” I assured him. “But you must n’t call me Sergeant any more.”

“No? Why not? Are you planning to disobey orders again, or do you want a commission?”

“You bet I ’m not — and don’t,” I declared fervently.

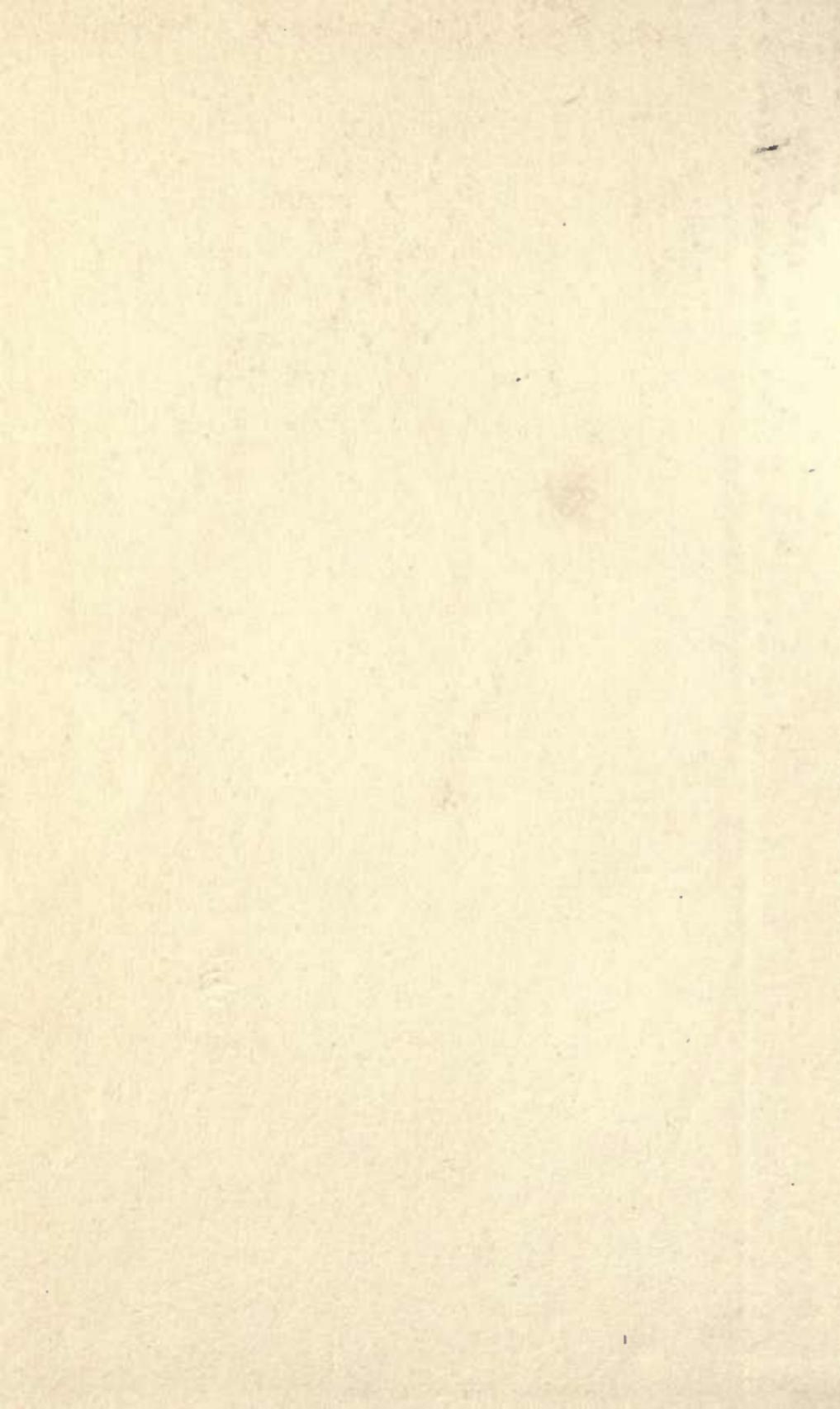
Father sometimes forgot to correct me when I used unladylike expressions.

“In that case, I think you can have your

rank restored," he said gravely. "But you know a sergeant in the Marines must be —"

"Semper Fidelis," I interrupted. "Well, I had to promise to be that and more too before Mother would let me come to the dance to-night! Oh, Josh — I mean — Oh, my goodness me! I 'm just naturally going to turn into an angel of peace instead of a fighting marine!"

"I 'm not worrying," Daddy laughed. "Not so long as your name is Jinks!"



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